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《伊底帕斯王》中的因緣法則

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摘 要

從亞里斯多德的《詩學》理論以降，希臘悲劇的必要元素，必定存在於《伊底帕斯王》。伊底帕斯王具備所有悲劇英雄的缺點及不可違逆的命運。他的悲苦似乎是命中注定的，但事實上是自我的偏執所造成。伊底帕斯的人生並非完全無助地由神力所操控，而是自己的性格所決定。本研究旨在以佛法的因緣觀詮釋《伊底帕斯王》，分析劇中導致悲劇英雄殞落的細膩因素。內容分三部分。第一部分探討尼采對於希臘悲劇的見解及對佛法的認同。第二部分闡述龍樹的中觀論，其性空及緣起觀和尼采有共通處。第三部分解析此劇所蘊含的因緣法則。

在佛法的檢視下，伊底帕斯即為眾生的代表。雖困在無止盡的苦海中，仍具有自由意志。因緣支配著伊底帕斯的命運，他的苦難由內、外因素所造成。驕傲自大是內在因素，外在因素有神諭、三叉路口及社會環境。這些外因需要如自大及憤怒之內因才能運作。因緣觀為此劇增添另外的解讀角度，顯示苦難必有其因，非先天註定。

關鍵詞：伊底帕斯、希臘悲劇、佛法、因緣

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Karmic Law in Oedipus the King

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Abstract

Since Aristotle's *Poetics*, whatever qualities thought necessary in a Greek tragedy have to be found in *Oedipus the King*. While King Oedipus seems to have the preordained destiny and flaw of all tragic heroes, his misery can be attributed to the attachment to his selfhood. Oedipus' life is conditioned by the self-created karma instead of being manipulated helplessly by the divine intervention. The purpose of this study is to interpret *Oedipus the King* from the Buddhist philosophy of karma, which elucidates the subtle reasons for the tragic hero's fall. The contents of this study are divided into three parts. The first part deals with Nietzsche's insight on the significance of Greek tragedy and his appreciation of Buddhism. The second part explores Nāgārjuna's theory of the Middle Way. The conception of emptiness and dependent origination forms spiritual alliance with Nietzsche's thought. The third part explicates the karmic law as manifest in the play.

Placed under the scrutiny of Dharma, Oedipus becomes the paradigm of humanity. We are all Oedipus, entrapped in ceaseless suffering but with a free will. The fate as shown in this tragedy reflects the rigor of karmic consequence. Hubris is the predominant internal factor that causes his downfall, whereas divine oracle, the forking road and social milieu constitute the external factors of his suffering. The external factors cannot function without the internal ones of pride and wrath. Karma sheds light on this tragedy, illuminating suffering to be dependent-arising without an inherent essence.

Keywords: Oedipus, Greek tragedy, Dharma, karma

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> *The sad truth is that we remain necessarily strangers to ourselves, we don't understand our own substance, we must mistake ourselves; the axiom, "Each man is farthest from himself," will hold us to all eternity. Of ourselves we are not "knowers." (Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy 149)*

It is a truth universally acknowledged that critical inquiry about Greek tragedy must be in want of *Oedipus the King*. Ever since Aristotle, whatever qualities thought necessary in a Greek tragedy have to be found in this work. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle outlines an ideal tragic hero with Sophocles' Oedipus as a perfect model. For a hero to be labeled tragic, he must be superior to average men in some ways, but he is also not "pre-eminent in virtue and justice." It is some "mistake" instead of "vice" or "depravity" that causes his misfortune (749). In Oedipus's case, the high social standing and intellect distinguish him from ordinary people. Despite being a respectable man, he is blind to his family background and unwittingly commits the crimes of patricide and incest. The mixture of good and evil in Oedipus is an indispensable element in Greek tragedy, which arouses the audience's pity and fear and the consequent purging of these emotions.

In Harold Bloom's view, Oedipus's mistake as conceived by Aristotle is the "ignorance" that shields humans against destruction:

> [T]he ignorance of the wise and learned remains an ancient truth of psychology, and torments us every day. I surmise that this is the true force of Freud's Oedipus complex: not the unconscious sense of guilt, but the necessity of ignorance, lest the reality-principle destroy us. Nietzsche, rather than Freud, is the truest guide to *Oedipus the King*. (4)

In this passage, Bloom alludes to Nietzsche's Apollonian illusion and Dionysiac reality in *The Birth of Tragedy*. He regards Nietzsche's perception rather than Freud's psychological theory as the true guide to this play. The force of *Oedipus the King*, as he discerns, lies not in the "unconscious sense of guilt" but in the "ignorance" of the noble hero to ward off the destructive force of Dionysus.

Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* and Buddhism

As Nietzsche illustrates in *The Birth of Tragedy*, we may shudder at the sufferings befalling the hero and yet the sense of victory and elevation is felt through the hero's sacrifice to the sublime moral norm: "struggle, pain, sufferings, most painful dilemmas, all the ugly, discordant things are depicted with relish to engender a higher level of delight" (142). The power of tragedy, in Nietzsche's view, lies in the "metaphysical solace" that serves to lift us above the whirl of pain and struggles (102). To explore the essence of Greek tragedy, Nietzsche uses Oedipus as the model of a tragic hero. He regards Oedipus as the greatest sufferer of the Greek stage and a pattern of nobility destined to error

and misery despite his wisdom (*Birth of Tragedy* 60). Oedipus draws the terrible lot of life, the terrors and horrors of existence of which the Greeks are keenly aware. In him coexist the Apollonian consciousness and Dionysiac wisdom. The horror of nature is the Dionysiac realm hidden by a thin veil of Apollonian consciousness. Despite the "Apollonian determinacy and lucidity" in the language of "Sophoclean heroes," the pride of knowledge hurls them into abyss of destruction (*Birth of Tragedy* 59). While Oedipus solves the Sphinx's riddle with the Apollonian agility of mind, he is also hurled into destruction by his pride. The entire canon of ethics, natural order and law in the civilized world perish by his actions, which are prompted by "the pride of knowledge." The conscious striving for accuracy and truth is Apollonian. In contrast, the intense suffering together with the horror of existence is the Dionysiac realm, and both are intertwined in Oedipus.

Nietzsche detects the value of Greek tragedy in its justification of the worst possible world through the hero's toying with pain. Oedipus is the paradigmatic figure of tragedy whose painful dissolution is never the end of his life. After the look into the abysmal disintegration of Oedipus, Nietzsche discerns the "luminous afterimage" of Apollonian consciousness to dispel the darkness of Dionysiac destruction (*Birth of Tragedy* 60). All the horrible suffering just fades away in the enchantment of Apollonian illusion. Oedipus substantiates the Apollonian light of intellectuality and rationality with his sense of duty, compassion for the populace and quickness of action. While he exhibits the rational and intellectual power of Apollo, he is unknowingly succumbing to the chaotic and horrible force of Dionysus. To illustrate the shattering force of Dionysus, Nietzsche borrows the image of the sea from Arthur Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea*:

> Just as the boatman sits in his small boat, trusting his frail craft in a stormy sea that is boundless in every direction, rising and falling with the howling mountainous waves, so in the midst of a world full of suffering and misery the individual man calmly sits, supported by and trusting the principium individuationis, or the way in which the individual knows things as phenomenon . . . His vanishing person, his extensionless present, his momentary gratification, these alone have reality for him. (Schopenhauer 353)

Opposing the "stormy" and "boundless" sea as represented by Dionysus, the "frail craft" refers to Apollo, the marvelous divinity of "principium individuationis" whose looks and gestures indicate "the full delight, wisdom and beauty of illusion" (Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 22). Despite being the "frail craft," Apollonian consciousness is the indispensable "illusion" that humans rely on to survive the onslaught of the "mountainous waves" of suffering.

Schopenhauer is the medium through which Nietzsche came to appreciate Buddhism as the guide to deal with modern Western illness (Lussier 8). Nietzsche's view of human life is indebted to Schopenhauer's philosophy, which he believes is the same as the Buddha's (Elman 684).The analogy

of the sea to Dionysian destruction evokes the Buddhist comparison of human life to the sea of suffering, also known as samsāra. In Buddhist teaching, samsāra means the ceaseless cycle of birth and death in which "individuals transmigrate from one existence to the next in accordance with their karma or moral conduct" (Keown 248). The sea is the Buddhist metaphor to convey a samaric existence wherein sentient beings are entrapped in immense suffering and deprived of autonomy over the external situation. For Buddhism, the vehicle to liberate people from suffering is the hearing of Dharma and putting it into practice, while for Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, the craft on the sea refers to the frail illusion to sustain human life. Despite the different meanings of the craft, the ocean is the shared symbol to connote the pain and sorrow of life.

As Robert G. Morrison indicates, Nietzsche's thought bears affinity with early Buddhism. Both see man as an "ever-changing flux of forces" and within this flux, there is no "autonomous or unchanging subject corresponding to such terms as 'self,' 'ego' or 'soul'" (63). Therefore, man is nothing other than the "totality of drives which ebb and flow in a continual flux of becoming" (110). In David R. Loy's view, both Nietzsche and Buddhism emphasize "the centrality of humans in a godless cosmos" and neither holds the "external being or power" responsible for the solutions to existential problems. Nietzsche embraces Buddhism for its "objective" and "positivistic" attitude towards suffering:

> Buddhism is a hundred times more realistic than Christianity--it has the heritage of a cool and objective posing of problems in its composition, it arrives after a philosophical movement lasting hundreds of years; the concept "God" is already abolished by the time it arrives. Buddhism is the only really positivistic religion history has to show us . . . it no longer speaks of "the struggle against sin," but quite in accordance with actuality, "the struggle against suffering." It has already . . . the self-deception of moral concepts behind it—it stands, in my language, beyond good and evil. (*Twilight of the Idols* 129)

The passage from Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols* affirms Buddhism as a "realistic" and "positivistic" religion superior to Christianity in that it emphasizes the battling against "suffering" instead of "sin." Nietzsche has the same positivistic view on Greek tragedy. The Greek culture, as he indicates, leaves the idea of "sin" behind: "foolishness, not sin, is the source of much evil and disaster: the Greeks, even during the heyday of their prosperity and strength, allowed that foolishness, lack of discretion, slight mental aberrations" (*Birth of Tragedy* 227). In Greek myth and tragedy, the characters never lacerate or rage against themselves out of the sense of guilt, as the Greeks are a noble and proud race that enjoys freedom by keeping bad conscience at a distance (*Birth of Tragedy* 227). The "foolishness," "lack of discretion" and "mental aberrations" condoned by the ancient Greeks shake off the "bad conscience" and original sin inculcated in Christianity. The fall of the tragic hero

has nothing to do with the violation of religious morality but has great accord with the ignorance of humanity much emphasized in Buddhist karma.

Nāgārjuna's Middle Way

In Buddhist philosophy, all the agony and pain can be explained by karma. As defined in Damien Keown's *Dictionary of Buddhism*, karma means that "freely chosen and intended moral acts inevitably entail consequences" (137). Suffering, therefore, is not the result of original sin; each person "has the final responsibility for his own salvation and the power of free will with which to choose good and evil" (138). The way karma applies the causal relationship to all things fits the scientific temper (Humphreys 100). Karma is not an outdated Buddhist teaching but compatible with the process of Western modernity because all things come into existence through the complex operation of causes and conditions instead of the capricious dictates of deities (McMahan 69). The Buddhist saint, Nāgārjuna's influential doctrine of Middle Way analyzes the causal relationship in the phenomenal world, revealing that everything is empty of inherent existence: "All things lack entity (hood), / Since change is perceived. / There is nothing without entity / Because all things have emptiness" (Garfield 209). Nāgārjuna's conception of emptiness, as Benjamin A. Elman points out, avoids the extremes of "nihilism" and "eternalism" (682). Instead of the flight into nothingness or nihilism, śūnyatā or emptiness theorized by Nāgārjuna sees all phenomena as "conditional, transitory, and devoid of a permanent self or substance" (Elman 682). As Nāgārjuna illuminates the non-substantiality of the world, Nietzsche regards human subjectivity as a fiction: "the subject is only a fiction: the ego of which one speaks when one censures egoism does not exist at all" (*Will to Power* 370). In Nietzsche's view, not only the subject, but truth is an illusion created by humans: "What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms. . . . truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that is what they are" (Kaufmann 46). As a precursor of postmodernists, Nietzsche has a deconstructive view on truth and morality. His contention of truth as metaphor and subjectivity as fiction reverberates with Nāgārjuna's perception of emptiness. As Elman observes, "There are similarities between Nietzsche's claim that there are only perspectives of reality and Nāgārjuna's contention that everything we say about the world or ourselves is empty of permanence. Both are views contained within a descriptive system" (685).

Nāgārjuna's theory of emptiness, while criticized as the most nihilistic of all Buddhist schools, complies with the Buddha's doctrine of the non-existence of the personal identity. There is no abiding self but only the "mental and physical states" to be located in this phenomenal world (Elman 685). Emptiness and karma are two sides of the same thing. Emptiness perceives the impermanence and alteration of worldly phenomena, while karma reveals the causes of their emergence. Human suffering, accordingly, is not an inherent or permanent entity but a non-fixed karmic consequence. In Nāgārjuna's formulation, there are twelve interlocking factors that lead to suffering: ignorance,

volitions, consciousness, namarupa, six sense organs, contact, feeling, desire, appropriation, being, birth, suffering (Siderits and Katsura 308). In Jay L. Garfield's opinion, Nāgārjuna's causal links function either as an account of human existence or as a "phenomenological analysis" of human experience (336). In Nāgārjuna's anatomy of suffering, ignorance is the first element that ushers in the latter psychological consequences. Ignorance involves one or more of the "three roots of evil," also known as the "three unwholesome mental states of greed, hatred, and delusion" (Keown 8). Greed means misplaced desire and attachment; hatred refers to anger, aversion and repulsion toward unpleasant things; delusion indicates the misperception of reality. The three poisons are the actions that arise out of human ignorance, which in turn trigger all kinds of suffering for ourselves and others. As Nāgārjuna instructs, "Wrapped in the darkness of ignorance, / One performs the three kinds of actions / which as dispositions impel one / To continue to future existences" (Garfield 77).

The liberation from pain and sorrow depends on the eradication of ignorance. The cessation of ignorance cuts off desire, which in turn obstructs the arising of suffering: "With the cessation of ignorance / Action will not arise" (Garfield 78). The misery of the general populace can be attributed to their own deeds, even in the teeth of fate. The twelve links reveal that suffering is governed by the principle of "dependent origination" and that suffering is empty and impermanent (Garfield 336). As expounded in the Middle Way, "[I]n a mental continuum, / From a preceding intention / A consequent mental state arises, / Without this, it would not arise" (Garfield 234). It is action that produces the bitter fruit of suffering: "Action precedes the fruit. / Therefore, there is neither nonexistence nor permanence" (Garfield 234). Nāgārjuna's causal view on suffering resonates with the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus' remark that "character is destiny." (qtd. in Winnington-Ingram 136). While god's oracle plays a crucial role in Greek tragedy, it is always the hero's personhood that should be responsible for his fall. Implicated in this dictum is the reign of karmic law in every aspect of human life.

Oedipus the King and Karma

Suffering and karma permeate *Oedipus the King*. The inconstancy of life finds expression in the evaporation of Oedipus's glory and fame into fury and shame. The distinguished and wise king ends up a pathetic criminal. The once loyal friend and brother, Creon becomes the target of his anger and accusation. The glorious royal family members are shunned as horrible monsters. Human relationship as well as subjectivity is unstable and threatened by the ever-changing external circumstances. The son turns out the murderer of his father, the mother becomes the wife of her son, and the children become the siblings of their father. Human identity in Oedipus myth is the conditioned existence as fleeting and transitory as the dews and bubbles illustrated in *The Diamond Sutra*: "As stars, a fault of vision, as a lamp, / A mock show, dew drops, or a bubble, / A dream, a lightning flash, or cloud, / So should one view what is conditioned" (Ch. 32).

Oedipus represents each sentient being entrapped in ceaseless suffering but with a free will. As R.G.A. Buxton asserts, the fate of Oedipus seems extraordinary, but in reality, "it is the distillation of common experience" (107-8). After knowing who he really is, Oedipus laments the inconstancy of life, seeing himself as "the son of Chance": "And the moons have marked me out, / one moon on the wane, the next moon great with power" (*Oedipus the King* lines 1191-94)[1]. In the end of the play, the chorus conveys the futility of human strivings:

> He solved the famous riddle with his brilliance,
> he rose to power, a man beyond all power,
> Who could behold his greatness without envy!
> Now what a black sea of terror has overwhelmed him,
> Now as we keep our watch and wait the final day,
> count no man happy till he dies, free of pain at last.
> (*Oedipus the King* lines 1680-85)

The tone of these lines is ironic and bitter. All the glory and achievement are a fleeting phenomenon. What the great king has achieved comes to nothing. The lesson from his life is a warning bell for each one of us; that is, it isn't until we die that we can be free of pain. The "black sea of terror" lamented by the chorus points to Nietzsche's Dionysian force of destruction and Buddhist samsāra.

The feeling of inexorable fate seems so strong that all the efforts turn out futile and human life is destined to be full of pain. But the Hellenic culture is not the pessimistic one that yields to suffering. They create tragic heroes like Oedipus to resist the horror of life. Vigorous, self-assertive, and ambitious, he pursues his aims in confidence and treasures freedom above all else. The cruel and hostile destiny cannot beat him once he acknowledges and accepts its blow. Realizing himself a plaything of fate, he protests that "I'll never see myself disgraced" (*Oedipus the King* line 1190). Confronting vicissitudes, he displays his dignity by the outcry, "what grief can crown this grief / It's mine alone, my destiny--I am Oedipus!" (*Oedipus the King* lines 1496-97). The tragic consciousness that he is the chosen puppet of fate empowers him to interrogate his destiny, and herein lies the force of tragedy. Albert Camus once remarked that "there is in the human condition a basic absurdity as well as an implacable nobility" (135). The absurdity of human condition refers to the limits of human rationality. Oedipus recognizes the absurdity of his life and reacts to it with the gesture of "implacable nobility." While making his audience aware of human limits, Sophocles makes them aware also of what humans can achieve within and in spite of those limits: "Just because the gods are remote, human character and human choices acquire great significance" (Buxton 125). Oedipus acts with such passion and intensity that he breaks the limitations and produces the mood "poised between hope and

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[1] In this study, the citations from *Oedipus the King* are based on Robert Fagles's translation in *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*.

despair" (Buxton 126). The fearless recognition of fate and suffering, as suggested by the mood of "hope and despair," is also a form of hubris. From the perspective of karma, the powerless yet rebellious attitude of a tragic hero amounts to the strong self-consciousness that leads to suffering.

Oedipus is the very sufferer whose afflictions are triggered mainly by his personality and partially by his environment. He dramatizes the sustainability of karmic energy in the way that he reaps what he sows. He turns his back on kinship in Corinth only to stumble into incest and death of kindred in Thebes (Gould 221). Oedipus myth shows that ignorance is the root cause of Oedipus's suffering. Ignorance obstructs him from having the correct view of himself and the world. His doom is not so much inherently ordained as dependent-arising.[2] All sentient beings are like a seed. For the seed to sprout and grow, it needs the co-functioning of the external conditions of soil, water, rain and sunshine (Sheng Yen 22). The internal condition of ignorance functions together with the external condition like culture and race to wreak havoc on Oedipus. King Oedipus is the plant growing out of the seed that is constituted by the blood of King Laius and Queen Jocasta. The contempt for Apollo's oracle shows Jocasta's excessive confidence of human power. With the same conceited mind, Laius strikes a stranger standing in his way. The proud mother and the wrathful father shape the character of Oedipus. The fate of Oedipus is attributed to his character, which directs his thoughts and actions. Individual personality plays no less a part in human life than god's oracle. The blind prophet, Tiresias, reveals this fact to Oedipus: "Creon is not your downfall, no, you are your own" (*Oedipus the King* line 432). Desperate to find solution to his plight, Oedipus must finally turn to the blind seer. And he is told to look at himself, to search his past life for the answer. Tiresias' assertion that Oedipus himself is to blame for his downfall echoes the self-created karma.

Under the driving force of pride and wrath, Oedipus takes quick actions and makes hasty judgment. He tends to size up a situation and act in an instant. He considers it necessary to give immediate expressions to his revulsion not in words but in action (Winnington-Ingram 135). In the beginning of the play, he answered the prayer of the suppliants quickly, pronouncing the excommunication of the murderer from all communion in the sacred rituals of Thebes and from all forms of association with Theban citizens. He had already sent Creon to Delphi and called forth Tiresias before the priest and the chorus advised him to do so. He spent sleepless nights figuring out proper solutions to his people's woes: "I've wept through the nights, you must know that, / groping, laboring over many paths of thought. After a painful search I found one cure: I acted at once" (*Oedipus the King* lines 78-81). Later, when he learned that as a baby, he was deserted and found in the mountain, he made a hasty judgment of his humble birth. The habit of his mind, in John Gould's

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[2] "Dependent-arising" is the principle that the Buddha used to explain the phenomenal world wherein nothing has a permanent and eternal entity (Kalupahana 34). Buddhism regards worldly phenomena as empty and impermanent without an inherent essence. The arising of everything is conditioned by various causes. Emptiness and dependent-arising refer to the same thing. Life is founded on the idea of dependent-arising and emptiness without self-nature.

view, is “quickness of rationality” that leaps ahead in making connections and in picking on the link in the chain of reasoning that must be tested later (218).

The agility of his mind is inseparable from his pride. Nietzsche diagnosed the cause of Oedipus’s downfall as the violation of the Greek norm: “it was because of his extravagant wisdom which succeeded in solving the riddle of the Sphinx that Oedipus had to be cast into a whirlpool of crime” (*Birth of Tragedy* 34). As a deity of morality, Apollo demands self-knowledge and self-control from his people. “Know thyself” and “Nothing too much” are Apollonian imperatives. Excess and hubris, on the contrary, are regarded as hostile spirits of non-Apollonian sphere. With the sense of pride and confidence, Oedipus fails to observe the limits of the individual. His excessive hubris finds a vivid expression in the scene when he answers the chorus’ prayers to the gods to save Thebes from the plague: “Here I am myself--you all know me, the world knows my fame: I am Oedipus” (*Oedipus the King* lines 8-9). Here, Oedipus takes on the role to be his people’s savior. Indignant at Tiresias’ refusal to reveal the identity of Laius’ murderer, Oedipus boasts of the superiority of his own intelligence over the seer’s vision: “I stopped the Sphinx! With no help from the birds, the flight of my own intelligence hit the mark” (*Oedipus the King* lines 452-53). Throughout the play, Oedipus’ sense of pride and superiority remains intact and unchanged. The knowledge of his true identity doesn’t diminish his pride but reinforces his self-consciousness: “My troubles are mine and I am the only man alive who can sustain them” (*Oedipus the King* lines 1549-50). All the torment serves to testify his invincible strength and he is the only person that can endure it.

Besides pride, wrath is another internal factor that leads to his destruction. When Tiresias arrives, Oedipus praises him as an omnipotent seer who has shielded Thebes from plagues in the past. Yet, he soon accuses him of being a “scum” when the seer refuses to reveal the cause of the current plague:

> Tiresias: You’ll get nothing from me.
> Oedipus: Nothing! You, you scum of the earth, you’d enrage a heart of stone!--Who could restrain his anger hearing you? What outrage--you spurn the city! (*Oedipus the King* lines 380-87)

His fury over the seer’s silence makes the vent in Creon, whom he suspects to overthrow him through conspiracy with Tiresias. The dark suspicion causes the wrong accusation against Creon: “I caught him in the act, Jocasta, plotting, about to stab me in the back” (*Oedipus the King* lines 718-19). It is the wrathful temper that drives him to attack King Laius and his followers on the forking road: “I strike him in anger!--and the old man, he brings down his prod, two prongs straight at my head! I paid him back with interest!” (*Oedipus the King* lines 889-94). He justifies the act of returning violence for violence, regarding it as natural justice. Karmic law stipulates that action must generate its due reaction. Oedipus’ wrath is turned against himself after he thrusts it upon Creon, Tiresias and his father.

The self-blinding violence is the most pathetic scene in the play. The bloody act pronounces his rage against destiny and his will to execute justice. Despite the manipulation of fate, he exhibits his free will by plucking out his eyes: “Apollo, friends, Apollo-- / he ordained my agonies--these, my pains on pains! / But the hand that struck my eyes was mine, / mine alone--no one else--I did it all myself!” (*Oedipus the King* lines 1468-1472) By imposing violence on his body, Oedipus finds release from his torment. He will not have to look upon his father and mother in Hades, nor to endure the intolerable sight of his children and the places in Thebes from which he banished himself (Buxton 109). Not ordained by Apollo’s oracle, his self-blinding is more the assertion of his free will than repentance. It means the refusal to access the god of light again and the associated values of intelligence and rationality. The self-inflicted violence redirects his resentment toward a certain object. Because he cannot attack the god, he attacks himself. When there is no effigy to be burned or god’s image to be destroyed, he hurts himself to relieve pain. As Nietzsche asserts, “The release of aggression is the best palliative for any kind of affliction” (*Birth of Tragedy* 263). To blind himself is the aggressive gesture that shows his extreme self-consciousness. It signals no submission to fate but the invincible pride and superiority.

Besides the expression of free will, the self-blinding scene also implies that “human knowledge and intelligence are fragile and limited” (Winnington-Ingram 136). It is the most radical way for Oedipus to protest against the divine intervention of human life. Without eyes, Oedipus will live in darkness in the future. But ironically, with eyes, he lives in mental darkness. As Buxton remarks, blindness is one of the most important motifs in Sophocles (105). The key word that reiterates the motif of “blindness” is “grope.” It appears first in Oedipus’ confession of his agony over the plague: “I’ve wept through the nights, you must know that, / groping, laboring over many paths of thought” (*Oedipus the King* lines 78-80). Tiresias also uses the word “grope” to predict the upcoming torment of Oedipus: “he will grope his way toward a foreign soil” (*Oedipus the King* line 518). “Groping” occurs the third time when Jocasta claims the blindness of human life: “What should a man fear? It’s all chance, chance rules our lives. Not a man on earth can see a day ahead, groping through the dark. Better to live at random” (*Oedipus the King* lines 1069-72). The recurrent images of groping through the dark endorse Buxton’s view that Sophoclean dramas highlight the limits of human insights (107). Because of the restricted perception, humans have to grope their way throughout their lifetime as if they were placed in pitch darkness. Sophoclean blindness chimes with Buddhist ignorance; both see the lack of correct thoughts in human judgment and action.

Oedipus’ character constitutes the internal factor, while his society is the external factor that brings forth his ruin. He is a political figure whose power derives from the community he rules so that his perceptions and feelings are indissolubly bound up with the experience of the men of Thebes (Gould 212). Cultural milieu exerts a powerful influence on his action. Thebes has been struck by a plague and no one knows how to put an end to it. The priests and suppliants hold Oedipus in reverence,

praising him as “first of men, / both in the common crises of our lives / and face-to-face encounters with the gods” (*Oedipus the King* lines 41-43). They plead for his action to defend the past glory: “Act, defend yourself, your former glory! / Your country calls you savior now / for your zeal, your action years ago” (*Oedipus the King* lines 58-60). Oedipus’s identity is constituted by his people who look up to him and call him “savior.” To answer their urgent request, he relentlessly seeks the remedy to the plague, which in turn unveils his crime. The fighting for justice is to serve his country and meanwhile honor his obligations: “So I honor my obligations: I fight for the god and for the murdered man” (*Oedipus the King* line 279). Self-consciousness creeps in when the motive for his action centers around the “honor” of the “obligations.” Oedipus’s sense of duty for the community is intertwined with his attachment to the personal glory.

In *City of Suppliant*, Anqeliki Tzanetou indicates that Greek tragedy is the projection of “Athenian hegemonic ideology” (2). The tragic hero’s compassion and generosity toward the suppliants reflect and justify the imperial ideology of ancient Athens. As the strong are validated to rule the weak, Oedipus has every reason to claim his power as a king and savior. The suppliants in the tragedy serve as the foil to legitimize the king’s power. Seen from karma, the suppliants are not merely the weak and helpless victims in need of the king’s rescue. They function as the external conditioning to expedite his calamity. The weak and helpless, though tormented by pain and disease, compose the overwhelming force that indirectly crushes the power of the strong. It is their pleading that initiates the king’s quick action and determination to find the cause of the plague. Karma expands Tzanetou’s view that Athenian tragedy mirrors the city’s imperial ideology. More than a reflection of Athenian hegemony, Oedipus myth reveals the fact that the weak can exert their influences on the strong and further subvert their domination, just as the suppliants function as the contributing factor of Oedipus’ downfall.

Besides the Theban people and their crisis, Apollo’s oracle is another external factor of Oedipus’s suffering. The oracle causes the abandoning of Oedipus in the wilderness soon after his birth. The knowledge of Apollo’s oracle drives Oedipus to leave his adopting parents, which leads to his encounter with King Laius on the forking road. Without asking for Apollo’s oracle to control the plague, he wouldn’t have found himself to be his father’s murderer. On the surface, the god’s oracle is the divine interference in the human life. In a deeper sense, it signifies the cultural constraint that excludes the minority from entering the mainstream society. Oedipus can be interpreted as one of the underprivileged that are branded with stigma since their birth. The dominant power dramatized as the Apollonian oracle constructs his identity as the source of social upheaval and corruption. Yet, he is not the docile but the rebellious one that fights against the given identity and strives for his autonomy over a new life in a foreign land. The oracle is generally recognized as the manipulation of fate, which is ruthless and irrational. Yet, from the conception of karma, the oracle can be understood as the external

conditioning of human thought and action. Without the oracle, there won't be the action of the forsaking of Oedipus and the chain reactions to it.

Oedipus leaves Corinth for a new land where he can shake off the cursed identity as his father's murderer and his mother's husband. He comes to a place where three roads meet and he has to decide which road to take. The crossing of two boundaries, therefore, signifies the critical moment in life when one must make a choice. Oedipus happens to choose the path that leads to the future disaster. Gould regards Oedipus's suffering as the consequence of his blurring of the two boundaries, that of the human and divine worlds. He discerns in Oedipus the "double-sideness" of the native and alien states, the coexistence of the human and divine worlds (222). In Gould's view, Oedipus belongs not wholly to men's world but also to an alien land outside human understanding. It is the world that mocks the rules and values of human society. Penetrated by the marginal, shepherds and seers, the alien world is beyond human intelligibility. While the name "Oedipus" means swollen foot, it also refers to the deserted and abominated individual denied access to the mainstream society. Although he is the son of the Theban king, he is also from the alien foreignness of mountains and of forking road, and therefore poses threat to the civilized world. The forking road provides the chance of his annexation as a savior-hero in a new society. Yet, while he brings the boon for Thebes, he also carries the bane.

Gould's opinion of Oedipus's "double-sideness" suggests the causal effect of karma. The crossing is a critical move that triggers the subsequent suffering not only for Oedipus but for Theban people. The individual choice exerts a huge influence on the communal life; the personal violation of natural law leads to social disaster. Patricide and incest, though committed by a single person, are the source of the plague that afflicts the whole society. It is Oedipus's horrible crime in the past that throws Theban people into the current despair. It is the revelation of his true identity that wipes out the plague from the city. The microcosmic world of Oedipus merges with the macrocosmic one of Thebes. Once the contamination from the individual is removed, the world will be restored back to peace. Oedipus myth implicates the environmental consciousness in Deep Ecology[3]. Joanna Macy, a popular writer of Eco-Buddhism, emphasizes the organic wholeness of the world. There is no separate and isolated self but the "ecological self" or "eco-self" that coexists with other lives of our planet:

> [A]s open, self-organizing systems, our very breathing, acting and thinking arise in interaction with our shared world through the currents of matter, energy, and information that move through us and sustain us. In the web of relationships that

[3] The term, Deep Ecology is first introduced in the early 1970's by Arne Naess, a Norwegian activist and philosopher. Aldo Leopold, an American wildlife professor, developed other related concepts from it, such as land ethic, living community and the web of life (Henning 27). Different from scientific ecology, which features the detached observation of nature, Deep Ecology emphasizes the "spiritual dimensions of the environmental movement" (Henning 26). Spiritual and holistic, Deep Ecology respects the earth as a living community wherein all lives have deep and reciprocal relations with each other.

> sustain these activities there is no clear line demarcating a separate, continuous self. (187-188)

The enlightenment of the Buddha, in her new interpretation, lies in "paticca samuppada, the dependent co-arising of phenomena, in which you cannot isolate a separate, continuous self" (189). Eco-Buddhism expands Nāgārjuna's self-created karma to the shared one, highlighting the mutual influences between the individual and the environment. Oedipus is not a separate and isolated being but the one interwoven into the Theban society. His choices and actions influence the whole country and vice versa. He embodies the "ecological self" that is interconnected with the larger world.

Karma seems to be pessimistic in that it attributes the present suffering to the past crimes: "This body is not yours. It should be regarded as the product of former karma, affected through what has been willed and felt" (Conze and I.B. Horner 66). Apollo's oracle in Oedipus myth embodies former karma. The oracle, interpreted earlier as the cultural constraint, can also be viewed as the load accumulated through previous lifetimes to devastate his present life. He has no autonomy over the oracle, just as he cannot determine the cultural milieu in which he was born. Despite his given identity, his future depends on the present actions. Karma harbors a positive prospect for getting rewards from here and now, for each incident is at once the result of all that has preceded it and a contributing cause of all to come (Humphreys 103). Ananda Coomaraswamy sees the interrelationship of karma and free will: "Buddhism is fatalistic in the sense that the present is always determined by the past; but the future remains free. Every operation we make depends on what we have come to be at the time, but what we are coming to be depends on the direction of the will" (233). Karma and free will are inseparable; for the karmic energy to be generated and sustained, free will is indispensable. What will be reaped from Oedipus' self-banishment is the deliverance of the city from the plague and the temporary restoration of order and peace. The personal act here and now exerts a powerful pull on the future communal life.

Oedipus's free will is synonymous with his strong self-consciousness. Confronting his misery, he doesn't blame other people but considers himself the only one that can withstand it. The ensuing banishment provides him with another situation for the exercise of tragic consciousness. Far from negating the meaning of life, Oedipus's self-banishment affirms his unique existence to the extent of hubris. Blind and isolated, the culprit chooses to live in exile for the rest of his life. The banishment is a willed gesture to declare his resilience, fortitude and self-sacrifice to protect his country. In Buddhist view, the consciousness of one's uniqueness and superiority is self-attachment, which triggers the discrimination of self and other. The darkness of "ignorance" consists in the clinging to one's selfhood, from which the poisonous mental states of greed, hatred and delusion are inseparable. As Thanissaro Bhikkhu indicates, the root cause of suffering is clinging, and the most basic form of clinging is "self-identification." As long as self-attachment exists, suffering will not cease. Oedipus' pride together with his tragic consciousness is a form of self-attachment. The repeated claims that "I am

Oedipus" pronounce his self-assumed identity as a hero, savior and supreme sufferer soaring far above ordinary people. "*Of ourselves we are not knowers"*--Nietzsche's remark as cited in the beginning of this study evokes the Buddhist view on ignorance as the initiating factor of suffering.

Oedipus the King seems to have an implicit presence in the critical discussions of tragedy. Nietzsche's insights on Greek tragedy and Buddhism provide the space for Dharma to join the exploration of the play. Oedipus represents each sentient being entrapped in immense suffering and subject to the reign of karma as perceived by Nāgārjuna. While the tragic hero seems to be a plaything of fate and destiny, his life is governed by karmic law. Not until his past wrongs are exposed can he and his people be delivered from agony and anguish. Ignorance initiates the chain reaction that leads to suffering. Hubris is the predominant internal factor, whereas social milieu, divine oracle, and the forking road compose the external conditioning that induces his misery. The external factors co-function with the internal ones of pride and wrath, just as the seed needs nourishment from the outside world to sprout up. Despite his self-blinding and banishment, the attachment to selfhood persists throughout the play. The dignity he displays in adversity is a form of self-consciousness, which in turn generates the discrimination of self and other. While the tragic consciousness serves as the frail craft to sustain him through the black sea of life, it creates psychological consequences for both the personal and communal life.

Karma explicates the subtle reasons for the fall of the tragic hero. Oedipus is not born but rather becomes the supreme sufferer. It is his character that determines the course of his life and country. Karma implicated in this play is two-fold, the self-created and the shared. Oedipus has no separate selfhood; his is the interdependent self interconnected with his society. His wisdom of solving Sphinx's riddle delivers Theban people from disaster, while his impulsive acts and thoughts thrust them into despair. Oedipus conveys more than the inconstancy of life, the manipulation of fate, and the dignity of humanity. Dharma sheds a new light on the classical tragedy, illuminating the sorrow of life to be dependent-arising without an inherent essence.

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