

THE APPEAL OF OEDIPUS

Dr. Eva Cybulska, Psychiatrist

Perhaps the appeal of Oedipus lies in his **uncompromising search for identity** – a search for the essence of what it is to be human in all its ‘existential aloneness’. **The human condition is inherently tragic and paradoxical, and it is knowledge which makes it so.** Silenus, tutor and companion, to the god Dionysus is quoted as saying that “life is freest of pain when it is accompanied by ignorance of its own suffering.” Sophocles echoed this wisdom in these lines spoken by the Chorus in *Oedipus Rex*: “Ignorance made you happy. The truth has made you blind.”

Oedipus Rex is a tragedy of knowledge, vision and blindness: truth is trapped in **illusion**, and in the disturbances of language and emotion. Overwhelming pride, but also anger and fear, blinds reason. Initially, Oedipus is blind not only regarding his own identity, but also the identity of those he loves. Later, fear blinds him to the illogical basis of his conclusions. And yet, **as he loses his physical sight, his insight awakens.** This is the most crucial and poignant moment of dramatic reversal (**peripeteia**). It shows how **we allow our spirituality and compassionate humanity to shine forth only after abandoning the concreteness of our existence and our attachment to our possessions (including power).** Oedipus is a man true to himself, who by destroying his well-being creates his own fate and becomes who he is. Finally, he offers himself as a sacrifice to Thebes, the city which has revered him as a wise ruler, and the city he truly loves.