

It was Sophocles who once said that “Every man can see things far off but is blind to what is near.” Sophocles’s tragic hero Oedipus displays blindness in his inability to recognize the truth of his past indiscretions and in his questioning of the *dramatis personae* of the play.

Oedipus’s defeat of the Sphinx is established at the beginning of the play; this action in Oedipus’s past led the people of Thebes to have Oedipus replace their dead king Laius. From this point forward, Oedipus has the role of both king to his people and demi-god. The praise that Oedipus receives for lifting the plague from the city leads the citizens to believe that Oedipus has some gift of divine sight or knowledge, as no other man was able to solve the riddle of the Sphinx. This is reinforced by the elder at the beginning of the first episode saying to Oedipus that “of all men [he] is wise in the ways of God.”

But what made Oedipus initially great would also turn out to be his downfall. To defeat the Sphinx, Oedipus had to ask it questions. His inquisitive nature appears later in his time as king during the second Theban plague. Oedipus’s first action of the play is to ask the citizenry their concerns about the plague even though he claims to already understand the full extent of the suffering of his people. When Creon returns from the Oracle, Oedipus tells Creon that “[his] words are ambiguous. I still hover between hope and fear.” As Oedipus begins to understand that a murderer of Laius still lives in Thebes, he immediately wishes to know everything about the late king and the circumstances of his death.

The heated argument with Tiresias in the second episode highlights Oedipus’s tragic flaws of anger and inquisitiveness. Tiresias warns Oedipus of the destructive nature of what he knows by saying that “It is a miserable thing to be wise when wisdom brings no reward.” As Oedipus becomes more belligerent, he displays moral blindness in accusing Tiresias, an old blind prophet, of murdering the late king. Tiresias’s rebuttal of “You blame me but do not see yourself,” is indicative of this concept of sight in the play. Tiresias is literally blind but is gifted with spiritual sight; for Oedipus, the opposite is true. Tiresias is wise in the ways of the Gods, but Oedipus, in his pursuit of the truth, morally blinds himself to a point where both his wisdom of the divine and the human has decayed.

In contrast to the first episode, in which Oedipus is established as the honorable king who is willing to suffer for the good of his people, the second episode shows that Oedipus has a temper. Oedipus's murder of his father was also done out of anger. His father forced Oedipus to move aside for him and his attendants on the road and for that, Oedipus saw it fit to kill him. Although murder on the highway was common in Ancient Greece, this rash action shows that Oedipus is human. And because he is human, Oedipus cannot be the demi-god that he and the people of Thebes believe him to be. His tragic flaw is not that he is easily prone to anger or that he asks too many questions, but that he fails to recognize how his anger and his thirst of information has blinded him.

Oedipus rapidly descends into decay as he finally learns all of the details surrounding his past that he wished to know. He ignores the warnings he receives from his wife and mother Jocasta and from Tiresias that the knowledge he seeks is destructive and cannot change what has already occurred. Oedipus fulfills the curse that he gives to Laius's killer at the beginning of the second episode, and his life becomes a "searing agony." But even in gouging his own eyes out, Oedipus still proves himself to be an honorable man in that he feels enormous guilt for what he has done. At the end of the play, he is literally blind to his surroundings, but his spiritual sight has become acute even though it had failed him repeatedly in his past indiscretions.