

Anita Vacation
English 11
Mr Giddings
January 2, 2007

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Vacation 1

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Oedipus Rex - Bliss in Ignorance

One of the most memorable and meaningful Socratic quotes applies well when in context of Sophocles' Theban Trilogy. "The unexamined life is not worth living," proclaims Socrates. He could have meant many things by this statement, and in relation to the play, the meaning is found to be even more complex. Indeed, the situation of Oedipus, king of Thebes, the truth of this statement is in question. Would Oedipus have been better off if he was blind to the knowledge of his birthing and the fate that was foretold to someday befall him? Truly though, his life would have been a far better and easier path had he never known about his true origins. His life in Corinth would have been long and prosperous, and Thebes would have lived on under King Laius (Walter ix). In fact, everyone would have been better off in the long run if Oedipus had not ventured out beyond the walls of Corinth. So is it worth living an examined life?

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Socrates had made this statement long after the creation of the Theban Trilogy. In the context of his own time, this was meant to imply that life must be examined and reflected upon, known and discovered by each individual philosopher to better enrich life for all. "Yet in terms of Sophoclean drama, specifically Oedipus Rex, this was meant in a vastly different way. The unexamined life was one that was in the dark, unknown as to what fate lied beyond every turn and irony of living" (Fuddle and Dede 212). Oedipus, up to the point in which he heard the comment in the tavern in Corinth, lived an unexamined life. To Socrates, he was an unfulfilled man, one who deserved to know more, one who not complete. However, in a much less metaphysical sense, Oedipus' life was complete, in that he had all that he needed, and was living

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a happy and fruitful life. As the drama progresses, he finds out more and more, learning exactly what the implications of his birth was, he suffers the fate for examining his life. So what Socrates had meant, that the life which was not rich with self exploration and reflection was not worth living, was indeed different than its application in terms of Oedipus, whose life was unexamined, yet complete (214).

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The question arises, what would life have been like, if Oedipus had not discovered his true origins? If he had stayed in Corinth, would this have ever happened? We find that indeed, we would have had no story, if not for that lone comment of a drunkard that sparked the fire of rebellion in the young prince Oedipus.(Chen) He ventured out to Delphi, to pry knowledge of his background out of it, and to discover if this was indeed the truth, despite the fact that his adopted parents of Corinth had assured him of it falseness. Oedipus leaves Corinth, fulfilling the Socratic idea of the unexamined life. However, we must evaluate the eventual consequences of his actions and the implications that they possess. What becomes of his fateful journey out of Corinth leads to the downfall of an entire city and family line. If he had not murdered King Laius, the Sphinx would have never descended upon Thebes, he would have never fulfilled the prophecy, and all would have lived on in a relative peace and tranquility (Walter xii).

As stated in *The Questions in Oedipus Rex*,

Once examining these aspects of the relationship between the quote and Oedipus Rex, we can come to a final examination of its implications. The question which was addressed, that of the value of the examined life, can be answered. Indeed, if Oedipus had not ventured beyond the protective walls of his adopted home, would anything such as what occurred in the play ever have transpired? If Oedipus had not pursued that answers to the mysteries that plagued him, despite the pleading warnings of Jöcasta, in fact his life would have been contented and happy. Instead, he follows the Socratic method of exploration and discovery, and proceeds down the path of pain and distraught (920-921).

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Was, after it was over, all worth it? We find that no; it was not. Being content and suited with what he knew of himself would have saved Oedipus and his children/siblings much agony. However, in the typical Greek tragedy, we must see his fall from grace through, which is indeed what happens.

In the bliss of ignorance, much pain and difficulty is averted. For what worries does the ignorant man have? In the case of Oedipus, ignorance would have suited him fine. The Socratic quote "the unexamined life is not worth living" certainly doesn't hold true in the case of Oedipus Rex ("Oedipus Rex" 45). While it may hold importance and a substantial meaning for our own lives, in the case of Oedipus Rex, he would have been better off without it. Indeed, for while the unexamined life is poor in a metaphysical sense, Oedipus would have truly been fine without it. For the unexamined life is a simple one, and he would have lived a long and happy life, never discovering the true nature of his birth, nor even caring.

Works consulted means you list all the research you found that was significant even if you don't use it.
Works Cited means you list only the research you have directly used in your paper.

Works Consulted

Bibliography is on separate page.

Chen, Quest. "Oedipus Rex: The Myth. <http://www.members.aol/annie/oedipus.html> (January 2001).

Fuddle, Ermus T. and Charles Dede. *Classical Greek Literature*. California: Macmillian Press, 1976.

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