Problem Of An Unfortunate Fate In Oedipus Rex

In Sophocles' play Oedipus the King, the self-righteous and short-tempered Oedipus Rex and his unrelenting pursuit of the truth instigates the suffering of Joscasta and the people of Thebes. Oedipus' tragic flaws demonstrate that the human desire for knowledge in the face of destruction may result in doubts about whether that information is worth the repercussions it brings about.

Oedipus' desperate search for the truth is detrimental for Jocasta, his wife and mother. After Jocasta comes to the realization that Oedipus is her son, she tries to dissuade him from continuing his search: " Stop—in the name of god, if you love your own life, call off this search! My suffering is enough" (Sophocles 222). While she is willing to keep the truth of Oedipus' identity to herself, her ultimate goal is to ensure that Oedipus never learns that the prophecy—that Oedipus must kill his father and sleep with his mother—has come true. Jocasta tries to protect her husband and son, Oedipus, but his hubris makes him blind to the adverse consequences of his actions. Oedipus' self-righteous attitude pushes him to find out his real identity no matter the cost, and the revelation of the truth ltimately pushes Jocasta to commit suicide. The chorus narrates, "And there we saw the woman hanging by the neck, cradled high in a woven noose, spinning, swinging back and forth" (237). Jocasta is tolerant when she is one of the few people who know the truth, but when it is made public, her shame pushes her to commit suicide. Oedipus' sorrow after Jocasta's suicide underscores the inherent tragedy of the play: his original allegiance to learning his identity and the repercussions showcase how the quest for knowledge has consquences that result in the question of whether the pursuit was truly worth it. This is comparable to modern times, where technology is rapidly advancing and making everyday lives easier, which begs the question of whether the advancement of certain fields of technology—war bombs or artillery— are detrimental or beneficial to society as a whole.

Oedipus' relentless investigation of his origins is spawned by the plague afflicting the people of Thebes. This plague, in the form of "a blight on the fresh crops and… the women die in labor," is due to the unavenged murder of King Laius, the previous ruler of Thebes and Oedipus' father (160). In a fit of anger where he kills Laius, Oedipus and his short temper lead to the downfall of the people of Thebes: "... the old man himself were about to thrust me off the road—brute force—and the one shouldering me aside, the driver, I strike him in anger!" (206). Oedipus' impulsive actions as a result of his irascibility cause the plague responsible for the Thebans' suffering before the play even begins. Oedipus unintentionally works as an instrument of the pain and death of the people of Thebes. However, his dedication to his people pushes him to continue searching for the truth; he begins with his uncle and brother-in-law, Creon. After Creon tells Oedipus the truth about the murder of Laius, Oedipus' short temper and impulsiveness is evident as he says, "When my enemy moves against me quickly, plots in secret, I move quickly too, I must, I plot and pay him back" (194). Even worse, Oedipus jumps to the idea that Creon is attempting to steal his throne. After being warned by Creon that his temper is his own worst enemy, Oedipus grows more enraged. His irascible attitude is detrimental because his inability to listen to others' opinions and handle the truth forces the people of Thebes to deal with the plague for an extended period of time. Oedipus' tragic flaws display how the need to figure out the truth can doom people to an unfortunate fate. Oedipus had no choice but to find out the truth—his people would have died from the plague if Laius' murder went unavenged. While

Oedipus had no alternative, many people today have the option to stop before possibly detrimental truths are uncovered. Ultimately, one of the largest struggles of humanity is drawing the line between pursuing the truth and living in ignorance.