



GSJ: Volume 12, Issue 8, August 2024, Online: ISSN 2320-9186

[www.globalscientificjournal.com](http://www.globalscientificjournal.com)

**Title: Modern philosophies as guiding principles to mitigate with  
Aristotelian Hamartia**

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**Abstract:** This research is an attempt to find reliable answers to the questions connected to the concepts of Aristotle on the sequence of events propelled by the inner weakness (Hamartia) of any normal human being that eventually led to the downfall from the status of fortunate condition to unfortunate condition. The definition of tragedy stipulated by Aristotle and its application by Shakespeare in his world-famous tragedies are referred to in this research as examples to understand the concept of Hamartia. However, the focus of this research is to connect the concepts of major five philosophies such as Existentialism, Stoicism, Hedonism, Rationalism and Pragmatism as answers to avert the negative consequences followed by Hamartia which is found in everybody's lives which includes you and me.

**Keywords:** hamartia, peripetia, anagnorisis, catharsis, existentialism, rationalism, Epicureanism, stoicism, pragmatism

**Introduction:**

Human life is a continuous struggle till death. Between birth and death, every man meets with problems due to two forces. One is external. The other is internal. In this research, the focus is on the internal weakness of man that contributes to his own downfall without the need of external forces. Man has no control over the external forces. However, his reaction to the external forces can be regulated by adopting few philosophies that will be the guiding principles to avert any tragic endings.

Shakespeare has produced many tragic heroes in his plays. However, tragedy happens not only for the heroes in drama but also it happens in the lives of all the human beings at one point or another. In this research, the focus is on the philosophies and how best it can be adopted at the time of peril or crisis to avert tragic end.

All human beings are the mixture of good and bad qualities. Hence, it is the responsibility of all human beings to minimise bad qualities and enhance good qualities over the years towards our final destination.

At this juncture, it is appropriate to understand the concepts of Aristotle that are influential to bring downfall in life.

Firstly, the concept of Hamartia

Origin of hamartia: Let us discover the roots of hamartia

Hamartia comes from the Greek-word *hamartanein*, meaning “to err.” It denotes an inherent defect within the character *themselves*, rather than one that the tragic hero has come upon while on their journey.

Aristotle first coined the term in *Poetics* when he described a character who was not defeated by an opposing or malicious force, but by their own error in judgment. Often this downfall is catastrophic for the hero and their society.

Aristotle’s portrayal of hamartia sets the bar for tragic characters in that the flaw is often excessive and blatant. Think of the classic literary term *hubris*; disproportionate pride topples the tragic hero’s life around them. Regardless of the moral being abused, we can define hamartia similarly: as a hero acts on their flawed judgment, their potential for success snowballs into destruction.

It is a fatal flaw in one’s character leading to the downfall of a tragic hero or heroine. As stated in the beginning of this research, all men and women are the heroes and heroines in their own personal life. A fatal flaw in character is not necessarily to be associated with the heroes in the drama. It can be with any one. Therefore, this research does not require looking up at the Shakespearean characters in drama to examine the tragic flaw. These Shakespearean characters are brought in as example because they are universal and all can understand them. Having looked at the Shakespearean character as a model, our primary focus goes towards the common people selected for the experiment with the application of modern philosophies to reverse the situation and thus averting tragic end which happened in the Shakespearean characters.

Second concept: Anagnorisis

This is the point in a play, novel, etc., in which a principal character recognizes or discovers another character's true identity or the true nature of their own circumstances. Realisation comes only after making the mistake. However, this research paper aims at averting the mistakes by applying the correct philosophy at the point of peril. Just a minute - thinking is required at this point. This can be done if we train our minds.

This point comes only after committing the fatal mistake  
"we see the tormented figure of Oedipus come to recognize the truth in a classical moment of anagnorisis"

The third concept is Peripeteia

This is a sudden reversal of fortune or change in circumstances, especially in reference to fictional narrative. There is a close connection between Hamartia and Peripeteia.

The down fall begins from Hamartia and it brings the reversal from a fortune position to an unfortunate situation.

Hamartia, often termed the "tragic flaw," is a linchpin of tragedy, representing a protagonist's inherent trait or quality that inevitably leads to their undoing. This article examines few main characters in the Shakespearean tragedy. First in the list is Macbeth, where ambition serves as Macbeth's hamartia, propelling him down a treacherous path of murder and moral decadence. English literature is enduring fascination with tragedy, a genre deeply rooted in ancient Greek tradition, finds its apex in the works of William Shakespeare. This article delves into the heart of Shakespearean tragedy, dissecting the pivotal concepts of hamartia, hubris, and catharsis to unveil their profound relevance and impact on his timeless plays. Hamartia, often termed the "tragic flaw," is a linchpin of tragedy, representing a protagonist's inherent trait or quality that inevitably leads to their undoing. This article examines the case of Macbeth, where ambition serves as Macbeth's hamartia, propelling him down a treacherous path of murder and moral decay. Hamartia, as seen in Macbeth, is a driving force behind the calamitous events that define Shakespearean tragedy. Hubris, characterized by excessive pride and defiance against fate or higher powers, is another elemental aspect of tragedy.

The second example is the tragedy of Othello, we observe how Othello's unchecked jealousy and arrogance become his tragic flaw, ultimately culminating in the devastating murder of his innocent wife, Desdemona. Shakespeare masterfully exploits hubris to orchestrate a sense of inevitability

within his tragic narratives. Catharsis, an idea attributed to Aristotle, describes the emotional purification experienced by an audience when witnessing a tragic play. Shakespeare's tragedies, with their emotionally charged tales, excel at invoking catharsis. The poignant finale of "Romeo and Juliet," where the young lovers' deaths expose the futility of family feuds, evokes profound emotions of sorrow and empathy. Shakespearean tragedies thus provide audiences with an opportunity for emotional and moral introspection, facilitating catharsis. In conclusion, Shakespearean tragedies continue to resonate across time and cultures due to their adept handling of hamartia, hubris, and catharsis. Through characters like Macbeth and Othello, Shakespeare probes the human condition and the flaws that lead to one's downfall. Moreover, these works offer audiences catharsis, enabling them to grapple with complex emotions and ethical dilemmas. As we study Shakespeare's works, we are reminded of their timeless relevance, demonstrating the enduring power of English literature. Shakespearean tragedies remain not as relics but as living, thought-provoking narratives that engage and inspire.

One of the clearest examples of hamartia can be found in *Oedipus Rex*. The titular character is plagued with a simple tragic flaw throughout the story: a lack of knowledge. He doesn't know that he is the son of King Laius and Queen Jocasta.

This ignorance propels the plot and Oedipus's downfall. As an infant, Laius hears a prophecy that Oedipus will kill him. To avoid this, Laius gives Oedipus away. Oedipus grows up believing he has different parents, and when he hears from an Oracle that he is doomed to kill his father and marry his mother, he runs away from his adopted parents.

Oedipus ends up back in his hometown, and inadvertently kills his real father, not knowing who he is. He then runs into his real mother, and marries her.

When the truth finally comes to light, Oedipus gouges his eyes out. All of this happens because of his hamartia— he didn't know who his real parents were.

*Hamlet* is another iconic example of hamartia in action. In Shakespeare's famous play, Hamlet is tasked with killing the man who murdered his father. But at every turn, Hamlet is paralyzed with doubt and indecision— his hamartia.

This fatal flaw results in tragedy— Hamlet kills the wrong man, resulting in his lover's suicide. By the time Hamlet finally kills the right guy, it's too late. Nearly everyone he loves is dead.

Like *Oedipus Rex*, this hamartia propels the play forward. If Hamlet didn't have the tragic flaw of indecision, the play would be a whole lot shorter with a significantly lower body count.

As Gatsby nears his life goals, his unharnessed determination threatens his success, and his hamartia leads to the loss of Daisy, the death of two supporting characters, and even his own murder.

No man is without weakness. All men have their own weakness. Hence, If man knows where he is weak, he will be extra careful when in action. If the weakness goes undetected for a long period of time, it becomes the habit. It is a regular way of dealing with an incident. There the weakness will play a major role in making the incident worse or complicated. All men don't have this capacity to have a clear judgement over their action. Therefore,

Methodology:

The experiment with modern philosophical intervention to avert the disaster when dealing the problems has been undertaken with 100 students in the final year in the university.

The following problem-areas identified to assess how each individuals deal with it with the assistance of philosophical application. The other set of students with no knowledge of philosophies. The two groups are final year students.

1. The decisions on the selection of food to eat.
2. The decisions on Love and sex
3. The decisions on interpersonal relationship
4. The decisions on expenditure
5. The decisions on dealing with learning difficulties and the learning environment
6. The decisions on Self-discipline
7. The decisions self-judgement
8. The decisions on Judgement on others around
9. The decisions on family problems
10. The decisions on time-management

The philosophy of existentialism, stoicism, rationalism, hedonism, and pragmatism are applied by one set of students in different situations when they confront with life problems.

Brief analysis of the above said philosophies and how they can be useful as guiding principles to avert unnecessary tragedies in one's life.

Existentialism is an attitude towards human sufferings. Human suffering has no set manual to find an answer. It raises deep questions on nature of human being

and the nature of anxiety despair, loneliness, grief, isolation, anomie and angst. It also deals with meaning of life.

There is a deep connection between Hamartia and Despair. The predicament of life is man-made. It is not natural. Predicaments are created by Hamartia. Hence, one must periodically examine the nature of his Hamartia and accordingly, he must get the insight from the existential philosophy.

Stoicism teaches to recognise what we can be control and what we can't. it teaches to determine our reaction to a crisis. It teaches us how to master ourselves and aim to be virtuous. It also teaches to ignore the people dominated by negative emotions. On top of it, it teaches us to move on in life without getting stuck due to our judgemental error and its negative impact on us.

Rationalism demands to search for the proper reasons to initiate any action during crisis or at normal conditions. The reason for which we initiate action must be rational. Rationality means that action must yield benefits at larger scale.

Pragmaticism requires a closer inspection at the practicality of accomplishing a task. Calculation on minor details should precede the action; if not, it will lead to disaster. For an example: starting a business. If the planning is poor, the execution too will be a waste of time, money and labour.

Conclusion: This research was administered with the final year students at Trincomalee Campus. 100 students were selected, and they were given 10 different situations, and the students registered their actions, reaction and the decisions at the time of ordeal, testing and crisis. The improvements found with the students who applied the philosophical concepts in practicality according to the situation. It was a battle between the inherent weakness (Hamartia) and the philosophical application at the crucial times where the decisions will be crucial in deciding the consequences.

It was a rewarding experiment where the students registered their improvement in decision making.