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Fate in Ancient Greek Philosophy and Religion

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The Greek term *heimarmene*, rendered in Latin as *fatum* and in English as “fate” (and occasionally as “destiny”), designates a doctrinal notion situated at the intersection of Greek religion and philosophy. The analysis of the interplay between the purported causality of fate and that of other forms of causation is a complex undertaking, closely connected with a range of religious questions. Reflection on fate gives rise to fundamental philosophical issues, including those concerning contingent futures, freedom of the will, determinism, divine foreknowledge, and providence. Furthermore, this theme is intertwined with numerous human situations prominently depicted in Greek epic and tragic literature—indeed, it has exercised a lasting influence on Western literature as a whole. Such situations include unexpected good fortune, the mortal inability to withstand misfortune, the practice of divination, and the relationship between human beings and the divine. Given the enduring relevance of themes such as free will, determinism, and divine foreknowledge within contemporary philosophy of religion, it is particularly fruitful to investigate how these questions were addressed not only by Greek philosophers but also by other Greek authors who are not typically classified as philosophers. In late antiquity, Greek thought revisited the problem of fate and divine providence within the framework of Christian theology, engaging in close dialogue with so-called “pagan” philosophical traditions. These exchanges constitute a significant contribution to the metaphysical understanding of fate.



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