

## Hamartia

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Hamartia is a literary term that refers to a tragic flaw or error that leads to a character's downfall. In the novel *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein's arrogant conviction that he can usurp the roles of God and nature in creating life directly leads to ruinous consequences for him, making it an example of hamartia.

Some additional key details about hamartia:

- A character's tragic flaw isn't necessarily a morally reprehensible one. On the contrary, the flaw is sometimes an apparently positive quality, such as trusting others. This is part of what makes hamartia a complex concept, since it links both good *and* bad qualities to tragic outcomes.
- In the case of a tragic error, repercussions are typically disproportionately larger than the error itself. Because of this, some scholars argue that misfortune, or fate, is an important aspect of how hamartia plays a role in the unraveling of events.
- Hamartia derives from the Greek word meaning "to miss the mark" or "to err."

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**Hamartia** is a personal error in a protagonist's personality, which brings about his tragic downfall in a tragedy. This defect in a hero's personality is also known as a "tragic flaw." **Aristotle** used the word in his *Poetics*, where it is taken as a mistake or error in judgment.

The term **hamartia** derives from the Greek ἀμαρτία, from ἀμαρτάνειν *hamartánein*, which means "to miss the mark" or "to err".<sup>[1][2]</sup> It is most often associated with [Greek tragedy](#), although it is also used in [Christian theology](#).<sup>[3]</sup>

✓ *Hamartia* as it pertains to [dramatic literature](#) was first used by [Aristotle](#) in his *Poetics*. In [tragedy](#), *hamartia* is commonly understood to refer to the [protagonist's](#) error or **tragic flaw** that leads to a chain of plot actions culminating in a reversal from felicity to disaster.

What qualifies as the error or flaw can include an error resulting from ignorance, an error of judgement, a flaw in character, or a [wrongdoing](#). The spectrum of meanings has invited debate among critics and scholars and different interpretations among dramatists.

Hamartia is first described in the subject of literary criticism by [Aristotle](#) in his *Poetics*. The source of *hamartia* is at the juncture between character and the character's actions or behaviors as described by [Aristotle](#).

Character in a play is that which reveals the moral purpose of the agents, i.e. the sort of thing they seek or avoid.<sup>[4]</sup>

In a [Greek tragedy](#), for a story to be "of adequate magnitude" it involves characters of high rank, [prestige](#), or good fortune. If the protagonist is too worthy of esteem, or too wicked, his/her change of fortune will not evoke the ideal proportion of pity and fear necessary for catharsis. Here Aristotle describes *hamartia* as the quality of a [tragic hero](#) that generates that optimal balance.

*Hamartia* is also used in Christian theology because of its use in the [Septuagint](#) and [New Testament](#). The Hebrew (*chatá*) and its Greek equivalent (*ἁμαρτία/hamartia*) both mean "missing the mark" or "off the mark".<sup>[8][9][10]</sup>

There are four basic usages for *hamartia*:

1. *Hamartia* is sometimes used to mean acts of [sin](#) "by omission or commission in thought and feeling or in speech and actions" as in [Romans](#) 5:12, "all have sinned".<sup>[11]</sup>
2. *Hamartia* is sometimes applied to the [fall of man](#) from original righteousness that resulted in humanity's innate propensity for sin, that is [original sin](#).<sup>[12]</sup> For example, as in [Romans](#) 3:9, everyone is "under the power of sin".<sup>[13]</sup>
3. A third application concerns the "weakness of the flesh" and the free will to resist sinful acts. "The original inclination to sin in mankind comes from *the weakness of the flesh*".<sup>[14]</sup>
4. *Hamartia* is sometimes "personified".<sup>[15]</sup> For example, [Romans](#) 6:20 speaks of being enslaved to *hamartia* (sin).

[Tragic flaw, tragic error, and divine intervention](#)<sup>[edit]</sup>

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[Aristotle](#) mentions *hamartia* in *Poetics*. He argues that it is a powerful device to have a story begin with a rich and powerful hero, neither exceptionally virtuous nor villainous, who then falls into misfortune by a mistake or error (*hamartia*). Discussion among scholars centers mainly on the degree to which *hamartia* is defined as *tragic flaw* or *tragic error*.