
Conundrums Encountered By Antigone

Antigone, the title character of Sophocles' *Antigone*, faces the moral dilemma of whether to honor divine or mortal laws. While King Creon has decreed "no one shall bury [Polyneices]," the laws of the Gods dictate that all corpses must be buried (Prologue. 20). As such, the issue at hand is far more complex than merely considering religion or legalities—Antigone must also consider familial loyalty to her brother Polyneices. She repeatedly refers to her duty as a sister and ultimately chooses to bury Polyneices, giving up her own life if need be. Antigone believes herself to be in the right, as she is defending her religious beliefs and protecting family, so she willingly overlooks any responsibility she may have as a law-abiding citizen.

As she defends her disobedience of the king, Antigone makes appeals to her personal responsibility towards family. She claims to be a "true sister," as opposed to the "traitor" Ismene who is reluctant to break the law, even for her brother's soul (1. 27). The usage of diction with such strong connotations, like the ringing condemnation of "traitor," reveals Antigone's extreme, black-and-white view of the situation (1. 27). She takes her obligation so seriously that she claims she "should have suffered" if she abandoned Polyneices (2. 71). Moreover, the aforementioned suffering would be a consequence of not only her failings as a sister, but also her "transgress[ions] [of] the laws of heaven" (4. 80). Such a religious undertone permeates Antigone's argument in support of burying her brother. She fiercely defends the belief that "there are honors due all the dead," and therefore, she has a responsibility to uphold the commands of the Gods (2. 113). Her dedication to religion is intertwined with a sense of duty to her brother, and it bolsters Antigone's decision to bury Polyneices. Antigone goes as far as to declare that "this crime is holy," thus implying a righteous crusade of sorts—yet the word "crime" reveals her awareness that it is still a wrongdoing (1. 56).

Therein lies another facet to Antigone's responsibilities. She also has a duty as a citizen, and as a niece, to obey her uncle Creon's laws. Her deliberate defiance is a criminal act. Furthermore, both her actions and words display an arrogance in her attitude towards authority. She offhandedly tosses out that the King's "strength is weakness" compared to the "immortal unrecorded laws of God" (2. 60-61). The comment is dismissive of Creon's power as a ruler and demonstrates her unwillingness to respect his law. As she asks for death, telling Creon to "kill [her]" since his "talking is a great weariness," she also displays a remarkable lack of respect for human life and the severity of death (2. 94-95). What she fails to acknowledge is that her ostensible martyrdom is not a solution, and her rebellious act will discredit Creon's authority. Creon himself notes that if his own family ignores his will, it will be impossible to earn the "world's obedience" (3. 30-31). In her obduracy, Antigone refuses to truly consider this consequence. She disregards the impact on Creon and the rest of the citizens when she

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focuses solely on burying Polyneices. In such a manner, Antigone deliberately makes a decision about where her responsibilities primarily lie: with her brother and with religion.

In a similar vein, Antigone's choice has resounding impacts on several characters, thus affecting the "community" at large. There is a rippling effect, beginning with Haemon's death (5. 71-72). His bitter suicide is directly attributed to Antigone's own suicide, as his "love [is] lost" then (5. 62). That in turn leads to the queen's suicide, as she stabs herself out of anguish over her son's fate (5. 115). In essence, Antigone's death has "bred death" in a chain effect (5. 107). However, before anything as drastic as loss of life, Antigone's actions cause Ismene to be arrested and nearly sentenced (2. 87). Considering death to be a reward of sorts, Antigone rejects Ismene's help not to save Ismene, but to avoid "lessen[ing] [Antigone's] death by sharing it" (2. 139). There is an irony in this situation; Antigone repeatedly affirms her loyalty as a sister with her dedication to her brother, but she utterly ignores her responsibility to protecting Ismene.

Thus, Antigone prioritizes her responsibility to the Gods and to her brother above all else. Originally, her inner conflict comprises of a struggle between obeying the king and fulfilling religious rituals for her brother. She ultimately chooses to bury Polyneices and accept the casualties that will result, whether it be her own death, Creon's distress, or Ismene's suffering. These repercussions become irrelevant as Antigone focuses on the broader picture, choosing to defend her brother by obeying the laws of the Gods.

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