

Student Essay

Antigone Versus Civil Law by Sophocles

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Antigone Versus Civil Law

Sophocles' play "Antigone" examines the age-old conflict between divine law and civil law, including the life-and-death consequences of obeying one system over the other.

The title character of Antigone believes divine law is the only legitimate, binding system governing a person's actions and their consequences. Viewing the civil laws of Thebes as unjust, Antigone buries her brother's remains in direct defiance of Creon's edicts that forbid such actions. She is completely unrepentant for her disobedience, stating "I deny nothing" when asked if she is aware that her actions were considered "criminal" (Sophocles, 708). Antigone further denies the validity of Creon's edicts in stating "It was not God's proclamation. That final Justice that rules the world below makes no such laws. Your edict, King, was strong. But all your strength is weakness itself against the immortal unrecorded laws of God" (Sophocles, 708). Despite the dire consequences for disobedience, Antigone remains true to her conviction that the civil laws created by Creon have no bearing on one's actions and are inferior compared to divine law.

In contrast, Creon believes civil law is the supreme law of the land and adherence to divine law isn't essential for governing a city. His arrogance and sense of superiority are exposed when he says "My voice is the one voice giving orders in this city" (Sophocles, 719). Creon's desire to control the people of Thebes is so complete that he will do whatever is necessary to maintain power. For example, he expresses indifference when Haimon threatens to commit suicide if Antigone is killed, stating "Let him do, or dream to do, more than a man can. He shall not save these girls from death" (Sophocles, 720).