

# Hubris in antigone and oedipus



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The idea of hubris is monumental in a plethora of Greek mythological works. In many ways the excessive pride of certain characters fuels their own destruction. This is certainly true with respect to the characters of Pentheus, Antigone, and Oedipus. All three of these characters demonstrate, through their actions, various degrees of arrogance that seem to undercut the traditional role of the Gods, and thus largely contribute to their downfall. However, it should be noted that while each of these characters demonstrate hubris, the way in which their arrogance manifests itself is unique to each character. Pentheus, the authoritarian newly appointed king of Thebes is immediately troubled with the rising influence and odd rituals that surround Dionysus. He seeks to prove his authority and influence over the kingdom, and crush the leader of these ecstatic rituals, which he perceives as a direct threat to his rule. Early on in the play Pentheus is warned by Tiresias, the old seer of the kingdom not to over stretch his bounds and to respect Dionysus as he would the other gods. " No we don't play at theologians with the gods. We stay close to the hallowed tenets of our fathers, old as time. Nothing can undo them ever. I don't care how brilliant or abstruse the reasons are" (Euripides 404). This passage is significant because it provides Pentheus with a direct warning not let his own pompous notions of earthly and temporal power go against the divine will of the gods. Pentheus disregards the warning and goes ahead in a direct act of sacrilege by destroying the sylvan alter and detains Dionysus. As Pentheus interrogates Dionysus he again is issued a direct warning not to go against the will of the gods by persecuting one whom the gods favor. As Dionysus calmly states, " Very well, I'll go along with this wrongful undestined destiny, but remember this: Dionysus, who you say does not exist, will wreak revenge on you for this" (Euripides <https://assignbuster.com/hubris-in-antigone-and-oedipus/>

417). The story culminates in Dionysus playing on Pentheus<sup>1</sup> curiosity and voyeurism regarding the intoxicated hordes of Theban women, by tricking him to go out to see them in action. Pentheus is brutally ripped apart by the possessed women, yet in effect it was his own actions that caused his destruction. As Dionysus directly addresses the hubris of Pentheus, “ The sins of jealousy and anger made this Pentheus deal unjustly with one bringing blessings, whom he disgracefully imprisoned and insulted; and so he met his end at the hands of his own kin) an unnatural end and yet a just one” (Euripides 453). Antigone also over steps her bounds, yet in a drastically different way. Rather than embracing the authoritarian ideals and decrees of Creon, the Stalinist new leader of Thebes, Antigone<sup>1</sup>s dual sense of pride and stubbornness fuels her personal reactions. Her belief that her brother deserves a proper burial seems to transcend logic and directly counter both temporal and divine authority. Antigone herself, by burying her brother, has taken on the role of the gods. Thus, she contributes to her own downfall. While Antigone believes that her actions are defending a moral good, it is the way in which she goes about her actions that propel her own hubris. She makes the burial rights a public question, rather than using tact and diplomacy to approach Creon)as Haemon demonstrates. Both Antigone and Creon are wrapped up in a personal struggle that is quite stubborn. Her actions, like that of Creon<sup>1</sup>s, are acts of hubris. The fact that Creon is wrong doesn't justify the actions of Antigone. In this respect both characters are quite similar despite their protagonist nature. As the chorus states, “ Surpassing belief, the device and cunning that man has attained, and it bringeth him now to evil, now to good” (Sophocles 14). Oedipus perhaps demonstrates the most direct and painfully obvious acts of hubris of the

three characters. His temper plays a crucial role throughout the play, along with his arrogance. He possesses a precipitous rage in his blind quest to uncover his past. Again, his grandiose sense of pride and impulse ignites his destined downfall. From the onset, the vanity of Oedipus is latent when he travels, against warnings, to the oracle of Delphi. His inflated notions of his stature as ruler directly question the authority of the gods, and lead to his eventual decay. Oedipus represents common notions inherent in tragedies of the precarious sense of human prosperity. Oedipus, in an extremely short time, has extreme highs and lows, which demonstrate the classic patterns of the gods' rough justice. This sudden and constantly altering nature of fate leads Oedipus to glory, yet his stubborn and arrogant quest to see<sup>1</sup> ultimately blinds him, as he is reduced to nothing in an instant. Oedipus<sup>1</sup> story exemplifies how destiny is inescapable. His quest to outwit fate, in effect, perpetuates his own destruction. This notion of tragic irony)trying to run away from destiny yet perpetuating it instead, illustrates the hubris of Oedipus. By disregarding the knowledge and warnings of Teiresias, and thus the gods, Oedipus's stubborn sense of pride goes directly against the will of the gods. Ironically it is Oedipus who states, " True; but to force the gods against their will)that is a thing beyond all power" (Sophocles 57). Simply put, Oedipus can not see that his actions are doing just that, and only when his hubris is punished and he loses his literal eyesight, can he finally see the truth.