

# Characteristics of a king who can fight anarchy and conflicts in antigone



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Throughout *Antigone*, Creon maintains complete confidence in his belief that, in order to prevent anarchy and chaos, the rule of a king must be obeyed even if it contradicts proper morals and/or the will of the gods. The decisions that he makes in an effort to defend this belief ultimately lead to his downfall and the death of most of his family. Of the many opportunities he is given to retract his decree against the proper burial of Polynices, the most significant are Antigone's dissent, Haemon's suggestions, and Tiresias' prophecy. Through the use of repeated examples illustrating Creon's failure to change his views, Sophocles demonstrates his own belief that a king who puts his desires above maintaining a moral standing and the laws of the gods is ultimately corrupt and will inevitably be met with bitter consequences.

Antigone's initial rebellious actions in reaction to Creon's immoral decision directly exhibit how his belief causes anarchy rather than preventing it. In denying Polynices' right to a proper burial, a right that is given to all human beings during this time period, Creon is not only acting immorally but also against the will of the gods. Antigone is the first in the play to realize his mistake and that it is her duty to break the rule of the king, claiming "that this crime is holy" (192). Her use of and attachment to the word "holy" portrays Antigone's loyalty to divinity which happens to be the greatest contrast between her and Creon: their faith in the power of gods. While one could argue that Creon believes his word to be equal or even superior to that of the gods, Antigone "would not transgress the laws of heaven" even if she must act in opposition to the laws of the kingdom because she values life after death over which the gods have immense control (228). Through this statement, she explains how the law of the gods should always be upheld

before the law of the kingdom no matter the circumstances. Yet her god-permitted dissent is not enough to sway Creon's stubborn mind, thus bringing out objection from a new, more significant source: family.

Creon's second fatal mistake is his rejection of his own son's plea to spare Antigone's life. As Haemon fails to convince his father to change his mind, he becomes more and more disappointed in his father's foolishness. At first he just suggests that "there are other men who can reason, too; and their opinions might be helpful" (218). Sophocles uses Haemon as a preacher of his own belief in the importance of understanding and even incorporating the ideas of others into one's own ideas. It is also important to notice Haemon's choice of words. In using vague language ("there are other men") and the qualifier "might," Haemon attempts to make a rational suggestion without offending Creon. However, the king remains stubborn leaving Haemon with no choice but to directly confront him. He even points out his father's fatal flaw, stating that "it is not reason to never yield to reason" (219). In this remark, Haemon calls out his father for being so stubborn, specifically in his inability to recognize the good judgment of others when it contradicts his own opinions. Through his remark Haemon describes the type of leadership that should be expected of not only the king of Thebes, but the ruler of Athens as well. However, Creon's stubbornness is too strong as he claims "My voice is the one voice giving orders in this city!" (220), once again denying the existence of the gods' power within his city and demonstrating how his character in the play fails to understand the significance of the gods and their will. With stubbornness prevailing over even familial dissent, the

gods must turn to Creon's last opportunity to fix his mistakes — through the tongue of a prophet.

The final and most crucial mistake that Creon makes is his disbelief of the blind soothsayer Tiresias' cautionary prophecy about his absolute rule. As Sophocles attempts again to convey his moral values through his characters, Tiresias states that " a good man yields when he knows his course is wrong" (232). Not only is a literal voice for the gods giving Creon general advice for leadership, but he is also directly stating that the actions that he is currently making are actually wrong. Regrettably, he once again fails to take advice from others, even if it comes from the mouth of a prophet who has previously successfully demonstrated the strength of his abilities to Creon, claiming that " Tiresias, it is a sorry thing when a wise man sells his wisdom, lets out his words for hire" (232). With those words, Creon made his worst mistake of all: repeating the same blunders as Oedipus, a man from whose mistakes he should have learned. In failing to learn from the mistakes of his previous ruler, who was an infamously poor example of a king, Creon has made it clear that he is not worthy of his position in the kingdom. Even with three different chances, each with incentives and logic exceeding the last, he refuses to back down, forcing the wrath of the gods upon himself and causing the deaths of his son, his future daughter in-law, and his wife.

Antigone is a guide by which Sophocles hopes to teach his audience of proper democratic morals. Through Creon's mistakes and failure to make amends to his situation, Sophocles demonstrates the corrupt nature of leading like such a king and the power and importance of the qualities of humility and self-reflection. While Creon believes that any order of a king

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must be upheld in order to prevent anarchy and chaos, Sophocles explains instead that others' opinions must be appreciated, one must be willing to recognize their own mistakes and either attempt to undo them or prevent a recurrence of such mistakes, and that one's desires must never be held above the will of the gods. Creon's character is the representation of a leader that is undesirable as a ruler of Athens, giving Sophocles the power to explain the characteristics that are needed in a king in the 400s B. C. E. and into the future.