

Justice and inequality in oedipus rex and antigone research paper



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Inequality and adherence to outdated cultural traditions are two of the main sources behind the tragedies that were seen in the case of Oedipus Rex and Antigone. For instance, in the case of Oedipus Rex, the origin behind the tragedy can be traced to the belief of King Laius in the words of an oracle. The mere fact that he was willing to believe in something that “ might” come true on the basis that an oracle stated shows that the problem is a mistaken belief in a cultural tradition that is far from what can be stated as being logical.

The same can be seen in the case of Antigone, wherein the female protagonist (i. e., Antigone) places religious belief over the laws established by the state. On the other end of the spectrum, the issue of Antigone can also be traced to the problem of inequality in Greek society at the time. The opinions of Antigone when it came to the burial of Polynices were surreptitiously ignored due to the fact that she was a woman. In fact, her treatment at the hands of Creon and Haemon shows that she is considered as an item to be owned and disposed of rather than an actual person who has rights.

The first theme in the Greek stories is the absolute nature of the authority of leaders and how they are apparently not subject to the same restraints as their followers. In the story, we see Oedipus threaten a Shepard to get information and inform that if he is not given what he wants, there will be torture and execution (Diski 49). In Antigone, we see Creon imprisoning Antigone in a tomb for burying a body. This shows the concept of absolute authority in action wherein the leader’s status grants them the capacity to issue orders which normally sound criminal yet are followed anyway.

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The second theme of leadership in the case of the Greek stories is based on leadership being attained through great deeds. For example, in Oedipus Rex, we see Oedipus solving the riddle of the Sphinx and then being subsequently given the leadership of a city (Mahony 290). This eschews any type of actual governing ability and focuses on the fact that he accomplished a great deed for the city (Kousoulis 155). On the other hand, in present-day society, great deeds are interchangeable with the concept of popularity.

Election into leadership positions is now based on how popular you are, resulting in a majority vote within the election process. While leaders at present are required to show the capacity to actually lead, it does show that leadership, as we know it is basically a popularity contest. In line with this train of thought is the leadership of Adolf Hitler, who became a leader of the Nazi party due to his popularity. His leadership is well known in history as the direct cause of millions of deaths and the genocide of the Jewish population. This shows that being just popular does not make anyone a good leader.

From Oedipus Rex to Antigone, we see examples of social injustice and inequality at play based on the plight of Antigone and the Shepard. Antigone suffers by virtue of being a woman while the Shepard suffers by virtue of being part of the common working class. Their rights are not considered to be equal to the commands of their rulers, resulting in absolute orders being meted out into unjust acts (Kovacs 56). This shows that Greek society is basically hierarchical, wherein women and ordinary workers are not thought of like the ones having the same social rights or even the capacity to experience proper justice. In fact, it is implied throughout the stories that the concept of justice is one that is based on the intercession and will of the
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Gods rather than being in the hands of humans. This creates the notion that for ordinary people, justice is something they have to pray for and not something that is given to them by virtue of their inalienable human rights (Nassar 148).

The same themes occur today, as seen in the case of rampant inequality and laws that favor the rich. The leaders in both Oedipus and Antigone show themselves as owners of absolute power and worry very little about the consequences of their actions; the same can be said about those in power today (Miller 245). Wealth, prestige and popularity are the vestiges of power in societies around the world at the present and they are only accessible to a small percentage of the population. There is little in the way of a significant trickle down effect resulting in the rich getting even richer while the poor get much poorer. This, partly due to the way in which the current system has been constructed, results in some correlation to the system seen in the Greek stories which limit the capacity of the common men and women from being able to exert their rights.

Injustice today is similar to what can be found in the Greek stories based on the continued isolation of power and opportunities towards the rich. Simply put, we all seem to have been placed in a similar position as the Shepard where we apparently have no choice but to follow what is being dictated. The rich today can be described as people with the same type of absolute power that Oedipus depicted in the story due to the fact that they are the ones who create laws, dictate the progress of the current system and are apparently immune to the same application of justice unlike the common human being.

Evidence of this can be seen in multiple cases where a rich person is
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arrested for a crime yet subject to what can be considered as the equivalent of a “slap on the wrist”. On the contrary, an ordinary person committing the same kind of crime may be punished harshly (for example, illegal drug possession).

After going over everything that has been presented in this paper, it can be seen that ancient literature helps to showcase problems that plagued society in the past. We can see whether society as we know it has grown or changed or if we are merely repeating the same mistakes that our ancestors made so long ago. Based on present day events and the way they resemble times of Antigone and Oedipus Rex, the outcome is rather unfortunate; past mistakes have apparently been repeated in the present. Through this paper, a window into the past has shown that we continue to repeat the same mistakes over and over again; hopefully, as people understand more about past and present events, similar instances can be prevented from happening in the future.

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