

# The existence of real justice in our time (based on sophocles' ajax)



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Since its creation, Greek tragedy has created a pattern of particular events. Not just politically speaking, but also diving deep in themes that include divine thought and interaction of humans as brothers or enemies to death. Sophocles' Ajax is no exception to that reasoning, treating themes like political hegemony and the truth behind one of the biggest "dark pages" in human history: Justice. But was it Ajax's story is an example on how justice and forgiveness can make triumph during a human conflict? In this essay will be treated an analyzed every subject exposed in the play and using references from all over the world we will discover whether there exists (or existed, as we'd like to think) real justice in our time (or in Sophocles').

Being performed in 445 B. Sc. the play represents the events occurred after Iliad and it can be said that it was made by Sophocles' boiling humanism and his deep interest in "human drama". This goes from the ideal possibility of oneself and putting the human being in the center of the action and developing, through him, all the events, as well as considering human emotion (fear, pain, love...) and its everlasting interaction with characters' environment. This is given by the fact that even after Ajax' death, he is still interacting with his comrades and enemies by the drama of his own sepulchre. In the same rough laws of the father (omois autois nómois patrós) needed is to tame it and make it similar to its true nature.

This is said by Ajax possessed by pain and insanity referring to his son. The mention of laws as an active formative element of oneself is one of Sophocles' deepest themes and inspirations in the play. His interest became focused on the event that unlocked the protagonist' craziness and the different perspectives on which the event was valued through time; the

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consequences that this process implied for Ajax, according to Sophocles' vision of tragedy and the ideas that can be taken from this to the history of the city. The play gets in the action after the trial of Ajax against Odysseus in which the last one goes out victorious. Defeated Ajax has revenge desires inside him and so he goes to the Odysseus' camp at night to take vengeance on his troops, which he means to kill while asleep, but the goddess Athena stop his enterprise by giving him a passenger craziness that makes him confuse humans and cows. After waking up from his insanity, and realizing the complexity of his situation (almost ridiculous) he decides to commit suicide. The drama is not ended with this, but with the conflict between the Atrids (which do not desire Ajax to be given a proper sepulchre as they consider him a traitor) and his half-brother that is willing to fight for the burial of the hero. The shocking intervention of Odysseus on favour of the deceased prevents the Atrids from dishonoring the corpse, achieves acceptance from Ajax' half-brother and make Ajax' right to a proper sepulchre prevail.

As said before, the play's major theme is justice and its consequences on the life of the hero and afterwards, his death. It can be considered as a way of evoking the thought in people by Sophocles that ancient Greece really had a debt with justice. But this is not necessarily true. If we analyze in the play the figure of Odysseus (one of the most introverted characters) we can almost instantly see that Sophocles thinks of Odysseus as a much nobler character than other Homeric poets in their respective plays. With that said, we can really think that if Sophocles' perception about Odysseus was true, then even with a manipulated trial were everyone judged as themselves and

did not make an impartial judgment (the slaves judged as slaves, the goddesses also did the same thing) there was still a sense of justice. Both sides were equally right. Basically speaking there were two different types of heroism both valid. Also can be said that most of the subjects in the play have something to do with the struggle of a fallen hero that carries the weight of all the people around him in his own shoulders and still do not run away or is a victim of fear.

Many academics of the play focused in taking an accurate significance to the historical events that influenced the play, most of them related with the debates in Athens about the reforms made in the legislation of the city. We can also consider Ajax as a symbolic representation of Athens against Sparta and Argos and an allusion of what the future of Themistocles would be (a contemporary citizen of Athens). Ajax' insanity can be considered also merely political because he understood that the distortion with which the world watched the hero was related with his extreme sense of moral and with his vision of external problems from a total self-sufficient and human perspective; this means, from a political perspective. In other way of seeing it, the tragic poet is sending a religious message since the beginning of the play when at the end of Ajax's life we realize that is not human judgment that has made his tragic end. It was divine judgment that has doomed him.

The play exemplifies with great success the Golden Age of Athens by defining a story where democracy rules the set in every moment and the resources of the other allied empires are given (with or without previous approbation) to the city that holds on the weight of all of its inhabitants and supports their lives. Also adverting that Ajax was one of the most politically

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compromised plays of the author as a wake-up call on the problems of ethic fundamentals and socio-political structure in Athens, manifested through the failures of Ajax's interests and Atrids'. Just being won by another point of view (Odysseus).

It all resumes in how enemies can be friends and how a political unfair judgment can find a way of being solved in ancient society. Not by laws or pompous procedures but as brothers. It is very clear for Sophocles; the only way of making peace is to understand each other's pain.