



The Concept of Law and Justice in Antigone

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Abstract

The quest of law and justice goes as far back as the dawn of human civilization. The quest of all knowledge, in the West, begins with the flowering of the Greek civilization where Homer comes with his Iliad and Odyssey, in the form of oral poetry. These works serve the first epics composed to sing the follies of war and human valor and efforts to establish a just and fair society. Although the early concept of justice seems to stem from revenge, honor, and greed for more power, later Greeks saw justice as human virtue. However, in Sophoclean tragedies, justice is sandwiched between the law of the land and the higher natural laws of Zeus. While Creon stands for the law of the land, Antigone represents the defender of the natural laws of justice. This paper attempts to explore how these competing ideas of law and justice resulted in the destruction of the Kingdom of Creon and the life of Antigone who stood for the laws of Zeus. The paper portrays the perennial conflict of these two concepts of law and justice as shown by Sophocles in Antigone.

Key words:

Law of the land, natural law, Polis, nomos, divine law, chorus, divine justice, positive law

The Greek Concept of Justice

One cannot think of human civilization divorced from law and justice for without it human society would be reduced to irrational animal world. "Ever since men have begun to reflect upon their relations with each other and upon the vicissitudes of the human lot, they have been preoccupied with the meaning of justice" (Allen 3). Although amongst murky and flimsy evidences, it is widely held that Justice is as old as human civilization. While its origin could be traced back to what Harari calls 'Cognitive Revolution' of the Sapiens 'between 70,000 and 30,000 years ago' (Harari 23), most scholars tend to resort to the flowering of the Greek civilization for the development of the concept of law and justice in human society. Harold Potter, explaining the elusive nature of justice, concludes that those who believe they understand the meaning of justice only land at its vagueness. "Aristotle, indeed, described justice as the practice of perfect virtue, but perfect virtue is a question of abstract principle (Potter 3). Tracing the history of justice in early Greek philosophy, Julius Stone contends, "Justice first came into view as a kind of metaphysical cosmological principle regulating the forces of nature on the elements of the universe, securing balance and harmony among all" (11).

In his short but brilliant paper, 'The Greek Concept of Justice' in Michigan Law Review, Professor Eric A Havelock traces the history of justice rooted in the ancient (oral) Greek tradition/culture. Professor Havelock goes as far back as Homer and later traditions of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. As all western history of epistemology ends with the history of Greek thinking, professor Havelock credits the shaping of Western thought process germinated and sprout from the great minds of ancient Greek intellectuals. Havelock quoting Bruno argues, "In

his classical study *The Discovery of the Mind*, Bruno Snell observed that the shaping of the Western thought by its beginnings in Greek thought has paradoxically impeded our ability to understand Greek authors: because we are accustomed to regarding the Greek way of thinking as obligatory, we instinctively – or should we say naively? – project it also into thought processes of another order” (Michigan Law Review 864).

The Greek concept of *dike* or more preferably *dike* of Zeus was the seed that evolved and led to the transition of Greek society from its very crude oral tradition to its literate stage according to Havelock. We generally accept that *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were composed orally at the beginning of early Hellenic period (900-650 B.C). Since there was no paper or other writing equipment known to have been invented, we can fairly believe that Homer had no choice but to follow the oral tradition. The development of civilization from villages to Polis and the rise of their moral and social consciousness gave a fertile landscape for the growth of cultural progress. Homer’s works, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are undoubtedly the two greatest achievements that opened new avenues for the cultural advancement of Greek society. Professor Havelock observes, “...and society’s *nomos* and *ethos* are revealed through actions performed by agents rather than through didactic statements” (Michigan Law Review 864).

The Greeks possessed an uncanny sense of philosophical penetration of natural and social phenomena. This made them precursors and the Genesis of human epistemology. As professor Bodenheimer observes, “By subjecting nature as well as society and its institutions to a searching, fundamental analysis, the Greeks became the philosophical teachers of the Western world and the Greek philosophy a microcosm of the world philosophy as a whole” (3). Western civilization is heavily indebted to the extraordinary flowering of the Greek culture some twenty-five centuries ago. That is why modern intellectuals, writers, and authors give the total credit of the progress of human civilization to the founding fathers of Hellenic culture. Richard Tarnas rightly observes, “Endowed with seemingly primeval clarity and creativity the ancient Greeks provided the Western mind with what has proved to be a perennial source of insight, inspiration, and renewal. Modern sciences, medieval theology, classical humanism – all stand deeply in their debt” (2).

Both *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the first great books of justice but their presentation of justice is not a direct pronouncement of *nomos* but rather contextual and situational humans, angels, demigods, and, of course, the major players – the humans – in this cosmic drama. According to Havelock, *Iliad* is one way of achieving justice “which is a procedure for resolving disputes before a mass audience whose witnessing of the contending parties’ confession, vows and settlements substitute for written documents as a written record of the event” (865). Therefore, justice is a solution to the physical and verbal conflict, with an effort of public negotiation. Even to this age, the art of negotiation is considered as the main threads to resolve the conflict – at all levels – and provide justice to each party. The need for justice in the modern age is the same as it was in those early Greek worlds except for the ways, tools, and apparatus of achieving justice have been different.

Similarly, another Homeric epic *The Odyssey*, observes professor Havelock, “is par excellence the oral encyclopedia of the maritime complex, encoding and reporting and recommending those patterns of Pan-Hellenic behavior which also could protect inter-polis traffic and enable the complex to work” (865). Thus, the idea of justice was not codified in the form of any writing rule of law, codes of behavior, or any other formulaic expression but the justice was shown a pattern of happenings & incidents as a natural consequence to actions and situations. In other words, they existed simply in the form of mores or ways of correcting the violation of natural order. It was not a community or state authority or a body of authority that would do the justice for the person suffering but it would be the person, himself, or herself to do the justice for themselves –in all incidents, happenings, and situations.

With the development of written language and an increase in literacy, the abstract form of justice took a form that is more concrete and reached its height with Plato. As professor Havelock states, “Nomos and ethos could be discussed without narrative, without agents acting or behaving in response to the other agents” (865). Havelock further contends that Hesiod composed in a more literate age than did Homer. “Hesiod was the first Greeks to isolate justice as a topic, yet he failed to articulate an abstract concept of justice because the linguistic conditions of pre-literacy were still strong. Hesiod could describe what justice did, but not what justice was” (866). Havelock further discusses that after Hesiod the idea of justice was isolated as a topic by Plato adding a ‘to be’ copula which played an important role in the development of the idea of justice as Greek became a

written language. Another interesting example of what justice is; is found in the dialogue between Thrasymachus and Socrates. Infuriated by Socrates' power of destroying his definition, he roars, "Listen, then, says the angry Sophist, I proclaim that might is right, and justice is the interest of the strongest..." (Durant 21). This raised the question of what to do to get justice. Whether we should seek righteousness or we should seek power – and, whether it is better to be a good person or a strong person.

Justice in itself is such a complex idea and has such fluidity that it defies any one single definition. While it may be justice to someone to be in might, it may be just the opposite (injustice) to the other. Plato explains justice in so many ways. Because justice comes with strength, some dictators in human history have equated the actions of men in power (rulers) as justice. However, Plato never meant that whatever is done by the stronger is justice. Later in his dialogue, Plato replies to Thrasymachus, and Callicles, "Justice is not mere strength, but harmonious strength – desires and men falling into that order which constitutes intelligence and organization; justice is not the right of the stronger, but the effective harmony of the whole" (Durant, 51). Thus by associating the idea with intelligence and organization, Plato saved the meaning of justice from being misinterpreted by any despotic ruler in a state. Similarly, for Plato "justice is a *taxis kai kosmos* – an order and beauty – of the parts of the soul; it is to the soul as health is to the body. All evil is disharmony: between man and nature, or man and men, or man and himself" (Durant 51).

After Socrates and Plato, their successors and followers philosophized and contemplated on the concept of justice in the Greek intellectual tradition. Aristotle deserves credit for further elaborating the concept of justice among the Greek philosophers from Homer to Socrates to Stoics. In his *The Nichomachean Ethics*, book V, he elaborates the two kinds of justice – "Distributive Justice and Rectifactory justice" (112...114). For him justice is the best virtue of human beings and it is above all happiness. Aristotle argues, "...justice is often thought to be the greatest virtue, and neither evening nor morning star is so wonderful, and proverbially, in justice is every virtue comprehended" (108).

Aristotelian justice is further divided into two kinds of particular justice – distributive and corrective justice. As Morrison explains, "Corrective justice is that which supplies corrective principle in private transactions and is exercised by the judge in settling disputes and inflicting punishment upon the offenders", and "Distributive justice is an entitlement to a share in social goods relative to a person's function in the social body" (47). For Aristotle, man is superior to all other animals because of his sense of justice and if he is divorced of this sense is below the animals. As Simon James and Chantal Stebbings quote him, "Man, when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from law & justice, he is the worst of all" (77).

What Actually Happens in Antigone:

Time is eternal and this trope of 'time' is recurrent in Sophoclean tragedies. It is all 'Time' that plays with the destiny of the protagonists and other characters in all his plays. Time is so powerful that everything perishes with time. "Time and that perishability of all things existing in timereveals to itself the vanity of its striving. Time is that by virtue of which everything becomes nothingness in our hands and loses all real value" (Schopenhauer 16). In addition, it is always the chorus which is almost, always omniscient who can see or realize the fateful design of the characters' life. In *Antigone*, the Chorus praises the immortality of Zeus:

Sleep which conquers all else, cannot overcome thee:

Nor can the never wearied

Years, but throughout

Time though art strong and ageless (lines 606-609).

Similarly, 'time' destroys Oedipus when he blinds himself after learning the dangerous truth about his past. Here also the Chorus sings: "Time sees all, and Time, in your despite, /Disclosed and punished your unnatural marriage - / A child and then a husband" (Oedipus, lines 1215-1217). In *Electra*, when Electra the protagonist, doubts the wisdom of Chrysothemis, he answers with the reference of time: "who's wise and who is foolish, time will show" (line 1031). As if teleological design, all events of fortune and misfortune come in the slots of time in which human characters become mere puppets. When the world of the humans becomes perverted due to their vices, the gods manipulate it (as if in puppetry-show) with the threads of time. Heavy hands of time befall upon the wrong doers and the corrupted world is destroyed to begin it afresh. Only the god is imperishable

and everything is subject to decay and destruction. "To the Greeks the world and the gods were the work of an unfathomable necessity" (Schopenhauer 12).

In his trilogy – *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone* – the third is overtly political and related to justice. It deals with the most difficult and slippery path the head of a state must walk in between the clear leadership and an utter despotism. His own niece, Antigone who claims that the natural law of the Zeus is superior challenges the leader's law. This set of trilogy provided the most fertile ground for Aristotle to theorize about tragedy, that makes it a distinct species; which are, "plot, character, verbal expression, thought, visual adornment, and song-composition" (Jacobs 95). He was so well versed in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* that "His nickname was the Attic Bee because he could investigate wonderful pieces of literature and always return with a useful idea" (Jacobs 68).

Of the surviving seven tragedies, *Antigone* occupies a unique position for its theme and subject matter related to the eternal question of justice. Nowhere is the conflict between the despotic laws of a ruler and moral/ethical laws of nature/divinity, shown more pungently than in *Antigone*. Clearly, there are two parties here – Creon, blindfolded by his own created human laws (positive laws) and Antigone, who's a direct advocator of the laws of ". . . Heaven/Unwritten and unchanging" (Sophocles 16). Creon is so arrogant and believes that the laws of State are the supreme and for anyone who dares in breach of such laws, "Death indeed is the price" (Sophocles 9). Creon is the perfect example of what Aristotle described as 'consistently inconsistent character'. This is because Creon vacillates continuously between what he decrees as laws, and what Chorus and Teiresias suggest him to do as the laws of nature.

Importance of Funeral Rites and Burial in Ancient Greece

If the conflict between the eternal laws of Heaven and the laws of State is a recurrent theme in Sophocles (or rather Greek plays), the funeral right i.e. the Greek tradition of burying the dead, is the main reason of conflict between Creon and Antigone. It was a deep seated belief of the ancient Greeks that if a soul was left unburied for a long time it would not be able to cross over the river of *Acheron* and find peace. Therefore, by tradition, it was a duty of the survivors to bury the dead bodies in the existing customary manners – lamenting, giving libation, etc. Now the rising conflict in the play was this knot – Polyneices who was declared a traitor, was denied to be given any (royal) burial right by Creon, the new king. However, this was against the common belief and the tradition of Greek society that the dead must be buried in order to rest them in peace and save the land from pollution and to observe the law of Divine. It was a situation where the State law overrode the divine law. In other words, it was the State versus the public conviction. Hence, for Antigone religious requirements go beyond the State laws and for Creon it was necessary to preserve the laws made by himself. Therefore he rightly says, ". . . she transgressed the laws that I established; / . . . she shall not escape / The direst penalty" (lines 481...88). In other words, the play *Antigone* is a depiction of a war between the Divine Will and human reason.

Character Representations in Antigone

Antigone:

As the main protagonist of the play, Antigone represents a symbol of boldness and heroic character who challenges the State law against the Divine law. She is one of the four– Eteocles, Polyneices, Ismene & Antigone – children of Jocaste and King Oedipus. She is the harbinger of new generations – the triumph of Zeus' law over human law. Her name is eponymous which in the Greek sense means, 'the one who goes against the generations'. In addition, by her actions, her name truly fits this sense of Greek meaning. Like her father, she never gave up the conscience that dictated her and never yielded to the situations, i.e., Creon and his harsh laws. She is determined to bury her brother Polyneices who has been denied the burial rites, as he was declared a traitor. However, Antigone thinks, "There is no guilt in reverence to the dead" (line, 511). Antigone holds the belief that if she had left her brother to be unburied – i.e., left to be devoured by birds of prey and wild beasts, he would have suffered for eternity. When her sister Ismene tries to stop her from the dangerous enterprise, she repudiates Ismene with sarcastic comments. Again, Ismene reminds her that it is against the law not to follow what Creon orders, who was the sovereign of the State. Nevertheless, Antigone by her nature, as her eponymous name suggests, replies to her sister furiously, "He has no right to keep me from my own" (*line 49*). The way Antigone faces Creon shows her great courage, tenacity, or even foolishness as Ismene rightly comments, "You reckless girl! I tremble for your life" (*Antigone 82*). She at times satirizes, mocks, and derides

him. Her blunt reply to him makes her equal to him in reason and confidence. Upon questioning how she dared to disobey his decree (the law), she replies that in order to obey the 'unwritten' and 'unchanging' and eternal law of Heaven, she had to disobey his decree – which was a man's decree. She is also quite philosophic when she says, "I knew that I should have to die, / Even without your edict..." and a little later, "If you think it folly, then perhaps / I am accused of folly by a fool" (Antigone, 460-70).

Creon:

As a brother of Jocaste and the only remaining male elders after the death of Eteocles and Polyneices, he is crowned as the new king of Thebes. He enters the scene with his long speech that goes through lines 161-210. After his description of how with an end of the lineage of Laius, the race of Labdacus, he happened to be the king as the only remaining royal man, he promises his vow to the city and the people. Taking the full responsibility of the people as a new king of Thebes, he warns against the vices and praises for the virtuous. He threatens anyone who is against the city with upright penalty and praise for the one "Who show love to this our city" (210). He warns the Chorus –his courtiers and his advisor (or rather his yes men) – to "... defend the law now made... /... Not to connive at those that disobey me" (215-221).

He is an epitome of ego, self-pride, and arrogance who clings to his new laws made by himself without considering if he is disobeying the eternal laws of Heaven in obeying his own. He blames the Chorus and the guard for going against his edict in the love of money. As he is reported by the guard that the dead body of Polyneices has been disappeared and was buried, and, as the Chorus suggests him, "My lord ... / Do we not see in this the hand of God?" (279), he immediately suspects and charges them "I know that some these perverted others / And bribed them to do this act of all vile things / Currently on earth, none is so vile as money" (395-95). He also takes bitterly his own son, Haemon's advice and charges him as "the ally of woman" (line 470), and he does not want to "take a lesson from a very boy" (line 726). So, he is possessed by the single thought that only what he says and nothing else is right in the world. This blindness of his discretion with excessive ego, 'Know-all attitude', and stubbornness drag him to the darkest abyss of destruction, loss, demoralization, and fatal fall ultimately.

Haemon:

As the only surviving son, he is the epitome of liberalness, democracy, and honoring the commonly held beliefs of his subjects – that is the common people. He is also the fiancé of Antigone, and he has betrothed her. He invites Creon his father, the ruling king, to revisit his own discretion and reasoning that God has endowed all human beings. Praising his father in the beginning, he gradually advances to remind him of his folly. Haemon says, "The man who thinks that he alone is wise, that he / Is best in speech or counsel, such a man / Brought to the proof is found emptiness" (lines 706-10). By nature, he is a good advocator of liberal rules, a wise counselor, and a person who sees more weight in the belief of the majority than in the rigid laws made by a single ruler.

If we assume Creon as a Machiavellian dictator, we can take Haemon as a Lutheran reformer. In the beginning of his speech, he says that wisdom is the most precious gift to human beings to men but at the last of his deteriorated dialogue with Creon, esp. when Creon swears not to 'bandy words with him, Haemon leaves the hall as he cannot endure this "raging madness". Hence, we can say that Haemon is a young philosopher who collides with the ruthless, senseless boulder in the figure of Creon who is maddened by his own damnable pride and arrogance.

Ismene:

As a sister of Antigone that brave, strong in determination, and committed to divine justice, Ismene depicts the opposite of what Antigone is, or what her nature is. She is modest, simple-minded, submissive to power, realizing her weak position as a woman and from a cursed family and the hostile time of her fate. Although she equally loves her brother as her sister does, she is aware of her weak position to defy the proclamation of Creon not to bury the dead body of Polyneices. She is so alienated from the powerlessness and wretched conditions of her life that she immediately replies to Antigone's question, "O my poor sister! If it has come to this / What can I do to help or hinder?" (lines 39-40). She is a person who sees what is good or what is not good but cannot go against the decree of the ruler even if it is not good. She is a perfect subject for the rulers like Creon who says "Never will I approve of one who breaks / And violates the law, or would dictate to those who rule. Lawful authority / Must be obeyed in all things, great or small, / Just and unjust alike..." (lines 663-667). Although some

critics who charge her as weak or chicken-hearted may be right in a sense, this chicken heart is not selfish, overhaughty, or blindfolded with arrogance. Although she fears to shoulder the storm of consequences by burying her dead brother against the decree of Creon, she assures her sister that she would not hesitate to sacrifice her life and says, “My sister, do not scorn me, nor refuse that I may die with you, honoring the dead” (lines 544-545).

Teiresias:

In Sophoclean trilogy, Teiresias appears both in *Oedipus Rex* and in *Antigone* as a blind prophet, gifted with the sense of perceiving the past as well as the future. He lives in solitude with a helper boy and visits the kings and rulers when it becomes utterly necessary to warn them of their follies and blunders made wittingly or unwittingly and who are at the verge of death and destruction. But often he fails to change the mind of those ill-fated rulers and is in turn, blamed of working for money and gold. In the beginning, he expresses the hidden truth more obliquely and in more metaphoric language. But as they do not take his advice positively, and go adamant in their thought an action, and charge him of little knowledge, and doing so for greed of money and gold as a means of living, he opens the Pandora’s box – the secretes of their miseries. Nevertheless, the rulers fail to heed at his warnings. Either they do not realize their utter follies or it becomes too late for them to correct their blunders when finally they realize it. In case of *Antigone* too, same thing happens. Creon realizes his follies at last but it was too late to reverse the time. Therefore, Teiresias is a direct advocator of God’s will and order and Divine justice. He is in other words messenger from the God who came to give the last warning to the sinners. He is sightless by physical eyes of leather but is gifted of that sight – the clairvoyance – by which he can see the past, present and the future. In other words, he is the penultimate recourse to justice before the God's rod of final justice falls upon them.

Eurydice:

Just like most of the women in Greek tragedies – except for some protagonists such as Antigone, Clytemnestra, and Electra – Eurydice represents a bulk of those women whose existence lies in being a subordinate member of the powerful male-dominated family. Women have to be satisfied in being just a wife, mother, sister, daughter, etc., who is looked after by a father in childhood, by a husband during her youth, and by her sons during her old age, especially in the Hindu *dharmaśāstric* tradition. Their major role assigned and looks suitable, is to bear children, grow them, laugh, or cry for them or with them. They do not exist for themselves but for the other members of their family. To mourn, cry, lament, participate in the celebration of the success of their male members, or commit suicide at the loss of their family members seems to be the aptest natural role for them. Therefore, as a tradition, Eurydice, when she knows that her son Haemon is dead, goes quietly back to her room and commits suicide. She is a pathetic creature who is wiped away in the flood of miseries that Creon is also going to be destroyed soon.

The Guards or the Sentry:

They are the characters who appear without having their proper names – other pathetic creatures in the Greek tragedies. They are known or addressed by their work position. Their identity is limited to what they do but not who they are as individuals. In *Antigone* too, the guards have the same fate. On the other hand, their demure, humble, and lowly ways of presentation of the situation, occasionally show that they have an extraordinary sense of right and wrong or justice and injustice. This is because despite they work for the ruler’s decree and edict; they in themselves are the believers and adherents of the law of nature and divine justice. Here the guard in *Antigone* who brings the news of the disappearance of the dead body of Polyneices presents his story in such a long and convincing way that the audience can easily understand his knowledge of common sense, his situation, and his limitations and dangers from those who rule them. The guard’s expression in *Antigone* like, “I can suffer nothing more / Than what is in my fate...” (lines 235-36) or replying at Creon’s charge that he did it for money, “It’s bad, to judge at random, and judge wrong” (line 323) or at the king’s threat to take his life: God Grant he may be found! However, when he:

Be found or not – for this must lie with Chance –

You will not see me coming here again.

I thank the gods who have delivered me. (lines 327-331)

Chorus:

In Greek tragedy, the Chorus is a group of characters who is like a bystander, who sees the surging of events and their rise and fall but do not take a direct part or hinder the course of it. This group of people is a philosopher – seer who comments or appraises the acts of the other characters or protagonists. They explain the complexity of the situation, the mind of the protagonists, or the fate of the players in the drama of life. They also come between the audience and the players as narrators or future event predictors. Generally, they speak out those facts unspeakable from the mouth of the players.

Generally, Chorus comes as an interpreter of the fate or divine design of the time and the character's future or the forecasting of the characters' future. They also often suggest the rulers or supreme authorities. They also do act like the king's courtier and their yes-men as in *Antigone*. The Chorus in *Antigone* hints Creon the importance of realizing mistakes, and not making folly, so as not to fall prey to fate, doom, and destruction.

In *Antigone*, the chorus enters with singing the glorious history of their city-state, Thebes. They also sing the bravery of the Theban people and their victory favored by the supreme god, Zeus. They explain human nature and the consequences of pride and arrogance. In Strophe 2, they sing: *“Heavily down to the earth did he fall and lie there / He who with torch in his hand and possessed with frenzy” (lines 134-35).*

Human Versus Divine (Justice) in Greek Tragedy

All Greek tragedies depict the confrontation and conflict between the human understanding and ways of working and the design of god in nature. Divine laws state one thing and the characters make their own laws, which come in direct confrontation to divine laws. What exactly happens is – there is a smooth world of men and nature in the beginning, in all tragedies. The protagonist makes a fatal mistake wittingly or unwittingly which annoys the Gods above – Zeus, Apollo, etc., and the Gods plan to punish the offenders. However, Gods do it indirectly by means of worst situations and happenings. The characters or protagonists tend to make more and more follies – until they become the hoist of their own petard. Because they cannot see their looming dark fate, they strive to make corrections using manmade laws. This worsens the situation and they fall from bad to worse, to the worst situations. The same goes in *Antigone* too – Creon denying the honorable burial to Polyneices based on his positive law, and *Antigone*, the sister of the dead, challenging the decree of Creon based on her idea of natural or the divine law of Zeus higher than the human law. Creon, having both the executive power as well as the judicial power, decides to use his executive power to maintain civic law and order.

Tragedies are the depiction of human versus Natural/Divine laws. The Divine laws exist in the form of religious beliefs, traditions, customs, etc. The man, or the ruler, is given or has the responsibility to see that the life of the city-state goes smoothly and in accordance with the laws of nature. However, in the effort of establishing beauty, order, and organization in the life of people, the ruler wittingly or unwittingly mingles his pride and prejudices or his individual ideals with the ideal of Divine and creates a direct conflict with the Divine. One such folly, in the beginning, creates tension and gives rise to another folly, and in this way, a chain of follies upsurges in the amount or in number. This creates a duel between the human laws and the Divine laws, which perishes the man at the last.

In all works from Homer to Aeschylus, to Sophocles, the central question is the question of Polis and the Divine order. These plays show the nature of the order on which the pantheon gods of Greek preside over humans and the manner they should revere them. This conflict is shown in the tragedies of Sophocles and Aeschylus. In his plays, Sophocles paints the portrait of a man who does not deserve the harsh life he receives. In *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus, the son of Lias, is a victim of his previous generations – Lias himself. Oedipus is very little responsible for his unthinkable or unimaginable destruction and even the follies he made during his life. At least modern human laws would place not at all or very little guilt he made in his unfortunate life. Oedipus did completely unwittingly, what he did. There is ample space for the critics to claim that it is a grand design of the god's law rather than the human reason. However, there is a need for another research for this contention.

Nevertheless, in the play *Antigone*, the character – Creon – defies and violates the higher laws, which according to the ancient Greek beliefs were the Divine laws. He refuses to bury Polyneices, who dies in the fight with his brother Eteocles but who is also a son of Royal family and royal blood – Oedipus and Jocaste. Creon's *raison d'être* for this edict was that Polyneices was an enemy of the State. Despite this fact, the ancient Greek Divine law had the mandate for the burial of any dead person. Creon refused to yield to the situation demanding the

right of burial. He also refused the indirect suggestion of the Chorus, his own son Haemon, and Antigone, who reminded him that Zeus' laws are superior to his laws. Upon inquiring how could she "dared to disobey the law" (line 149), Antigone clearly explains that the decrees of Zeus above and the laws of Heaven are superior that a person should observe and take care not to break than the petty laws made by a human being. As she answers:

*It was not Zeus, who published this decree,
Nor have the Powers who rule among the dead
Imposed such laws as this upon mankind;
Nor could I think that a decree of Yours –
A man – could override the laws of Heaven
Unwritten and unchanging. Not of today
Or yesterday in their authority
They are eternal; no man saw their birth. (lines 450 -57).*

After hearing this clear and universal sense of Divine laws preceding any human laws on earth, it is quite sensible to ask – how could Creon with such knowledge and experience about the things and world – could not realize his follies? How can a man who is so concerned about obedience and says that "there is /No greater curse than disobedience" (lines 671-72) and "where all goes well, obedience is the cause" (line 676) and despite the reminding of Chorus "Thy power, Zeus, is almighty! No / Mortal insolence can oppose the" (lines 605-6), that there is a more powerful law of Zeus than his; should disobey this law? Any simple modern man could have realized it. Nevertheless, here Creon was veiled by the 'maya' of his own pride of power owing to which he failed to see this truth.

Creon's repudiation of Antigone that he will have no women's law till he lives and his belittling of women by saying that "Better far / Be overthrown by a man / Than to be called the victim of woman" (lines 678-80) shows that he is under the veil of what modern radical feminists term as male chauvinism. By responding in such a manner, he is not only mocking Antigone and the whole women race but also mocking the gods by calling their laws women's law. This blind faith of Creon upon his own laws as the supreme to Divine laws infuriates the gods above and that ends the possibility of his retribution. This invites Creon the fiercest whip of the providence, and he is destroyed, bereft of all, in whatever else he took pride.

Creon loses several chances of realizing his follies. He is at first advised by Antigone that his laws are not superior to heaven's eternal laws. Secondly, the Chorus tries to remind him "My lord. . . / Do we not see the hand of God?" (line 279). Thirdly Creon refuses his wise son Haemon's suggestion that the city with a single voice denies Antigone to be criminal and retorts back to Haemon, "Must I give orders then by their permission?", and "Am I to rule for them, not for myself?" (lines 734 -736). This clearly brings out the despotic and tyrannical ruler in him. He wants the people to see what he sees, hear what he hears, or believe what he believes. He fails to see this simple-truth and boasts, "the king is the lord and master of his city" (line 738). Hameon rightly and curtly replies him, "Then you had better rule a desert island" (line 739).

Seeing that Creon is on the last verge of his ruin, gods send Teiresias to warn him and save him from the total destruction. The old prophet tells him how hellish has gone the environment of the city due to the unburied dead bodies mangled by wild beasts and birds. With very tender and affectionate Voice Teiresias says:

*Be warned, my son. No man alive is free
From error, but wise and prudent man
When he has fallen into evil courses
Does not persist, but tries to find amendment. (lines 1023-1026)*

Seeing that Creon is not yet ready to realize Teiresias again tries to arouse his last bit of sensibility by saying, "Yield to the dead, forbear to strike the fallen, / To slay the slain, is that a deed of valour?" (lines 1028-1029). However, this was no use to the tyrant having both judicial and executive privileges. Therefore, Creon, as a tyrant, thought that he was the law, as the head of the state having absolute powers. Thus, he opened a direct fire with the established eternal laws of Zeus. Thus, as a consequence of challenging the divine law and inviting god's vengeance, he lost all – his sons, his wife, his power/throne – and longed for death which he won't get so easily: *The last day of all, the day that brings death. / O come quickly! Come, though night with now dawn!* (lines 1329-31). This last call of the tyrant proves that the Divine laws are above the human laws.

Antigone versus Creon: Collectivism versus Individualism

In his award-winning play *Antigone*, Sophocles makes an effort to explore different facets of justice through the fates of his male and female characters. When the new king – Creon – promulgates the new law that the dead body of the traitor Polyneices be left bare to be mangled and devoured by the birds of prey, the wild beasts, and the insects, young and reason guided Antigone, the sister of the dead, openly challenges this one-man asserted decree as law. Therefore, she defies this new law, imposed against the common belief and tradition that the dead be given the final rites, lest the gods and goddess of the underworld, who receive the dead, would be annoyed, and punish the offenders living on the land above. Her rebellion against the man-made State law and her adherence to the Divine law made by Zeus depicts her as the representative of the public belief.

When Antigone is caught red-handed in her second visit to the buried body of her brother and brought before Creon for justice she is charged with disobeying the law established by him – the lawful authority who, “Must be obeyed in all things, great or small, / Just and unjust; “ (lines 666-67). But Antigone who believes and represents the collective belief in Divine law justly replies to Creon, “Was I to stand before the god’s tribunal / For disobeying them, because I feared / A man...” (lines 456-59). So here, the conflict is clearly between the protagonist representing the collective belief of the providence and the ruler representing a tyrant who is a mere ‘man’ according to Antigone. What is the law and good governance for Antigone? It is certainly the decrees of Zeus’ “unwritten and unchanging” (line 455) whose authority is not only for today or yesterday but forever. Hence, observance of moral, ethical, or religious piety would be acceptable rules and laws for Antigone. This is the definition of good governance for her. And for Creon, he would never tolerate the one “who breaks/ And violates the law or would dictate/ To those who rule” (lines 663-65).

So right from the beginning to the end of the play, Sophocles portrays the conflict between what is called the collectivistic idea of law and the individualistic tyrannical definition of law. While all Chorus, Haemon, Antigone, and Teiresias represent collectivism, the ruler – Creon – represents the concept of individualism. The issues were later elevated by Greek thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. As professor Friedmann states, “In the Republic that supremacy is so marked that there is not only no room for private rights but not even any institutions, such as family and property” (Friedmann 89). Hence, Sophocles' *Antigone* represents the perennial conflict between human versus Divine justice. This conflict and encroachment of one by the other can be seen even in the modern world. Displays and portrayals of cultural practices based on religious faiths against the state rules and laws are not rare – both in the West as well as in the East. However, notwithstanding the Greek concept, modern people seem to be convinced with the plausibility of the supremacy of state laws over the laws based on the religious faith. Richard Posner rightly contends, “Modern people understand, as Antigone did not, that loyalty to family must be balanced against loyalty to state, that a law based on nature is not “higher” than one based on culture, and that ties of blood do not entitle people to defy positive law” (135). What can finally be drawn from the Sophoclean tragedy is that a direct conflict between the state laws and the laws based on spiritual faith invites unending perils and the destruction for both executor (Creon) and the defender (Antigone) and a balance between these two competing concepts is inevitable to establish a just state. In this way, the plays of Sophocles continue to be a source of knowledge, inspiration, and learning even after several centuries of their composition. As Copi & Cohen rightly assert, “Despite their great age, the plays of Sophocles are enormously relevant today. They deal with eternally recurring problems and values such as love and sacrifice, the conflicts of generations, life and death – as central today as they were two thousand years ago” (102).

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