

Sophocles

ANTIGONE

A personal view

Contents

Preface	page 3
Sophocles	page 5
The Philosophy of Sophocles	page 7
Philosophy and the Philosophers	page 9
The beginnings of religion	page 12
Religion to philosophy	page 12
Socrates and Sophocles	page 14
The Heroic ideal	page 16
Sophocles and Law	page 20
On codes	page 23
On Kings and Aristocracy	page 23
On Custom	page 24
Codifying Law	page 24
Tyrants	page 25
The effect of Solon	page 26
The Phalanx	page 27
Three Tyrants	page 28
Previous to the play	page 29
Antigone	page 29
Honour or death, or both?	page 30
Antigone and Ismene	page 31
The Proclamation	page 34
The Sentry	page 36
Antigone and Creon	page 38
Enter Ismene	page 40
Haemon	page 43
Blood guilt	page 47
The Chorus	page 47
The Chorus and Antigone	page 48
Tieresias	page 51
The Messenger	page 55
Creon	page 58
What's wrong with Antigone	page 59
Sources and further reading	page 62

TO THE READER

It is almost impossible to portray Sophocles justly in this short work, and I do not boast even the intellect to call myself a scholar or even an authority on him. What I've tried to do is capture just an essence of him and his times. To do this is no simple task and I discovered that I couldn't do it just by focusing on Sophocles alone. I needed to compare him to just some of his contemporaries in both thought and literature. I hope that this will inspire you to find out a little more about him than I have done, or the next time you sit down and read or see one of his plays, to reflect upon him and his times in light of his works.

regards

Gino Tomisich
Melbourne 2001

Preface

Tragedy is difficult to define for how can you define a feeling, or a conflict of feelings? As difficult as it is to define it's even harder to write: as Goethe so eloquently put it, "I certainly do not know myself well enough to be sure I could write a real tragedy. I am frightened even to undertake it, and am almost convinced that I might destroy myself in the attempt." Tragic poetry was perhaps the greatest achievement of ancient Greek literature. Tragic theatre is considered by some the greatest artistic achievement of any age. Our own poetic and theatrical history stems from it, and any future of the same owes it's debt to it.

It was during the last century that we began to understand the forms of primitive culture, and it became a temptation to connect the origins of tragedy to this. Masks for example are used all around the world in mimes and dances by primitive hunter gather groups, and these have been compared to forms of ancient Greek cults. In these cultures the use of the mask may vary; most often it is used as some form of protection meant to guard against hostile powers. A mask can also transfer the power of what it represents to the wearer. It has been argued that primitive magic practices have not produced any real form of drama, so it seems valid to say that Attic tragedy in its decisive stages was solely the product of Hellenic culture and the genius of its poets.

Attic tragedy however just didn't appear - it evolved. That a mask can also transfer the power of what it represents to the wearer is very important for it brings in the element of transformation, which is essential to all dramatic representation. The mask was used for such purposes in Greece since very ancient times. In the cult of Artemis for example the mask played an important part, but masks played their most important role in the cult of the god to whom tragedy is dedicated - Dionysus. The use of masks in both comedy and tragedy was deeply rooted in the cult and this goes back to very early superstitious practices.

An indication of the power of masks and Dionysus comes from a decree at the end of the Seventh Century by the Trullan Synod: "...apart from the prohibition of other heathen practices Priests are not to wear comic, tragic, or satyr masks. And the abominable Dionysus should not be invoked when the wine was casked."

Within the domain of Greek culture there was no lack of practices which appear to have held the seeds of drama. Added to this, the ancient Greeks began to be conscious of their historical and artistic past in classical times. The oral tradition was alive and flourishing so we mustn't underestimate its importance. Aside from the epic poetry of Homer (the 'Iliad', and the 'Odyssey') that travelling story tellers knew off by heart, there was also the dithyramb. The dithyramb was a Dionysian cult song thought to have been chanted by a chorus and its leader. We do have a reference to the work of a choric poet, Arion, whom we find at the turn of the seventh

century BC at the court of the Corinthian ruler Periander. Herodotus tells us that Arion was the first to write, name and sing a dithyramb. This doesn't mean he created the dithyramb, for it existed well before him as a Dionysian cult song. Herodotus meant that Arion raised the religious chant to an artistic form, and since he named his songs according to their varying content he must have changed their character. Herodotus Book one (23) - "...It concerns Arion of Methymna, the most distinguished musician of that date, and the man who first, so far as we know, composed and named the dithyramb, and trained choirs to perform it in Corinth..."

A literal interpretation of the word tragedy means "Goat song", or "a song where the prize is a goat". Scholars have been arguing for ages which is the best interpretation (however which ever wins out in the end the translation does take a bit of the 'romance' out of it). Therefore the customs of the Attic peasants at their sacrifices or wine harvests, and antics like leaping over wine skins were looked at as worth studying. In this setting one comes across the god Dionysus and a man called Thespis. Thespis is the oldest known tragic poet, who was of peasant stock, and of him we read from Horace in 'Ars Poetica', "...that a peasant singer used to compete with a 'tragic' song for the prize of a goat, which contest only later involved a satyr play as well."

Unfortunately nothing of the writings of Thespis has survived, though we do have many commentaries about him. Thespis followed many of the usages of his homeland when preparing the ground for tragedy. We know he produced a tragedy for first time at the great state-sponsored Dionysian festival between 536 and 533. This doesn't exclude the possibility that he wrote plays well before that official occasion. It was at this festival under the rule of the great tyrant Peisistratus that a tragedy was performed (by Thespis) under the auspice of the state in Athens. From then tragic plays were linked to the Dionysian festival of the city.

We do know that the works of Thespis proved popular, and we once again look to Plutarch, "...At this time Thespis was beginning to develop performances of tragedy and the novelty of his enterprise attracted most of the city to watch, although it had not yet been made the object of a regular competition. Solon had always been a good listener and ready to learn something new, and now in his old age had become even fonder of leisure and entertainment, and for that matter wine and song, too, and so he went to watch Thespis act in his own play..."(Solon 29).

Tragedy at this stage had not yet reached its full potential. Thespis made a significant breakthrough - he was the first poet actor, and the first to introduce an actor on stage separate from the Chorus. It is also said that he invented the mask (representing humans). For when actors were introduced the old half bestial satyr masks had to be replaced as they would have proved inadequate.

If it was Thespis (and we can never be totally certain) that introduced the actor such an innovation with the mask should also be attributed to him. The question remains did he also make the Chorus discard their satyr costume? Once again we cannot be certain but since his pupil Phrynichus had no place for such costumes in his tragedies, it is likely that Thespis had already given the Chorus human form.

Added to these innovations we must also realise the immeasurable importance of the legendary content of the tragedies for their inner significance. The full range of Greek myth mirrors human existence - though they don't necessarily reflect a world view. They reveal a world so rich, so immediate to be almost unequalled. Beyond the heroes of the myths we perceive what ultimately determines the life of us all: human existence imperilled and asserted. When we see that what is at stake is always our entire existence, there is no question of

compromise, no evasion of hostile powers, no turning aside of our unconquerable will. We have then defined one of the essentials of the tragedy, which these figures of Greek myth epitomise.

The Greek myths were important to the tragic poets in yet another respect. The legends which inspired them were the common property of the people, they were sacred history and eminently real. The art of tragedy was part of the life of the nation and this was only possible in a community which didn't acknowledge a gulf between the populace and the educated. How important this was can be clearly seen by the gulf between the masses and the educated during Christian history up to and past the Renaissance. The myths and stories didn't tie the poet's hands in that they could only follow tradition, the freedom in the treatment of the legend was considerable. It was this freedom to interpret that gave the Poets the inner motive and power to drive tragedy to its fulfilment.

Sophocles

To many the epitome of this fulfilment are the works of Sophocles. According to various sources 497 -6 BC are the most probable years when Sophocles was born. He wasn't yet thirty years old when he won his first 'victory' in 468 with a tetralogy of plays that contained the 'Triptolemus'. If the Greek historian Plutarch's (45AD - 120AD approximately) account is reliable then this was his first performance. The circumstances of this victory were controversial. It is said that the impression made by the work was so strong that the Archon in charge of the theatre left the judgement usually made by self elected judges, to the Council of Generals under Cimon; and that this victory was given for 'political reasons' - that the content of the play suited Cimon's political agenda. If we look at Plutarch's Cimon (8), " They also remember him for the verdict he gave in the contest between the tragic poets which afterwards became famous. When Sophocles, who was still a young man, presented his first trilogy, Apsephion the Archon noticed that the spirit of rivalry and partisanship was running high among the audience and decided not to appoint the judges of the contest by lot, as was usually done. Instead, when Cimon and his fellow-generals entered the theatre and made the usual libations to the God Dionysus, he did not allow them to leave, but obliged them to take the oath and sit as judges, one from each tribe and ten of them in all. In consequence, the fact that the judges were so distinguished raised the whole contest to a far more ambitious level. Sophocles won the prize, and it is said that Aeschylus was so distressed and indignant that he stayed only a little while longer in Athens, before retiring in anger to Sicily..." Whatever the reason or reasons, the fact remains that he won his first prize with his first play.

Cimon was a great Athenian statesmen and General, and won distinction at the battle of Salamis. Subsequently he became the leader of the Conservative party. The Conservative Party had a pro Spartan policy. Between 476 - 462 BC he was virtually Commander in Chief of the Athenian forces. In 462 BC the Popular Party (Democrats) gained strength under the leadership of two men, Ephialtes and Pericles. With the Popular Party gaining ground Pericles and Ephialtes were able to secure the ostracism of Cimon in 461 BC for disgracing Athens by assisting the Helot revolt against the Spartans in 464 - 462 BC. The Helots were the original dwellers of the area that became Sparta, and were enslaved by the Spartans. Cimon was later asked to return to Athens to negotiate a peace treaty with Sparta during the Peloponnesian war. This became known as the Peace of Cimon.

Soon after the ostracism of Cimon, Ephialtes was assassinated and Pericles became head of the Popular Party. From 461 to his death in 429 BC Pericles maintained his position as virtual

head of state, and during most of this time he served as the ranking member (Strategos) of the board of Generals. Pericles was no military man, his field was diplomacy and politics. As an orator he had no equal and at the height of his powers was seldom seen in public. He spoke only when matters of great importance lay in the balance. His great powers of persuasion usually carried the day. He was dignified and many thought of him as aloof, however he was also known as 'the Olympian' among the general population. The sincere devotion of Pericles to the cause of democracy is open to question. Its unlikely he was a democrat in the modern sense, and he may have used democracy as a means to an end in Athens.

Sophocles it was said was in sympathy with the friends of Cimon. 'Antigone' being written in approximately 444BC was around the time of Pericles eclipse in power. What is supporting the 'sympathiser of Cimon' line of thought is his first victory, as mentioned previously.

Originally Sophocles used the title "Strategos" with Creon, which is the title Pericles used for himself. The similarities between Creon and Pericles are there, but this isn't to say that Creon is based on Pericles. Creon is a confident and assured leader who is doomed by the very qualities he possesses and deems essential in leadership. Creon also rules by personality, and becomes for all intents and purposes a Tyrannos (Tyrant). Pericles ruled Athens as a Strategos, through the force of his personality and political machinations for approximately fifteen years. A Strategos was normally elected in times of crises for periods up to a year. In all but name Pericles was the "King" or Tyrant of Athens. Was 'Antigone' a warning to him and the Athenians, or was it a foretelling of Pericles' destruction that came about through the plague, and for the Athenians after the disastrous Sicilian Expedition which cost Athens and her allies 45,000 lives?

Though Pericles died early in the Peloponnesian war having caught plague (as did a third of the Athenian population) it can be argued that his death and the war was brought about by his arrogance and quest for power. Had he lived, the outcome of the war would most probably have been the same - the unconditional surrender of Athens to the Spartans. Like Creon he too would have ended up a broken man because he couldn't recognise the faults in his character until too late.

Sophocles wasn't without influences in his formative years as a playwright. By his own confession it was Aeschylus that strongly influenced him in the beginning; and with whom his work overlapped for a considerable period. Only later did he move from the Aeschylean style to his more relaxed and natural style. Only works of Sophocles during his maturity and old age have been preserved and handed down to us so it is difficult to see how much influence Aeschylus actually had. Some classical scholars regard that his play 'Ajax' contains elements of his earlier style, however this is still open to debate.

Like Aeschylus, Sophocles also acted at the beginning of his career. This was usual at the time. Tradition has preserved, via the comic playwright Aristophanes, the story of his ball game when he acted as 'Nausicca' in the "Washerwomen" and his Lyre playing in "Thamyris". It is said that once his singing voice began to fail him he gave up performing. What is more probably true is that his more exacting standards forced him to focus on the writing and production of his plays and leave the acting to others. His creativity continued to a ripe old age, and the reports of scholars in Alexandria show they knew 123 of his plays in their time, of those we only know of 114 titles. Of those 114 titles only seven complete plays have survived to the present day.

Sophocles wasn't just a playwright, he was also active in the political life of Athens. In 443-2 when the districts for the payment of tribute were being adjusted he was Treasurer of the Delian Confederacy and shortly afterwards, in the revolt of Samos (441- 439) he was with

Pericles, one of the Generals, a function he probably fulfilled again in 428 in the war against the Aeneans. He certainly never won fame as a military commander or as a statesman, but to have gained these positions he was considered to have all the good qualities and civic virtues that an Athenian should have. It comes as no surprise then to find that he was appointed to being a member of the Council of ten 'Probouloi', who after the disastrous Sicilian expedition (413) were to use their authority to bolster up the now decaying Athenian democracy, without being able to prevent its downfall.

Sophocles was married to a woman called Nicostrata, who whom he became the father of Iophon. Somewhat late in life he formed a connection with Theoris, a woman of Sicyon, by whom he had a son called Ariston. Three other sons are mentioned by name but nothing is known of them. It is also said that in extreme old age he fell into the clutches of the courtesan Archippe, whom he made the heiress of his property, but this highly dubious as it was not permissible in law for an Athenian to disinherit his children. In society, as Ion of Chios relates, he was always witty and agreeable; and the friendliness of his disposition caused him to found a sort of literary club in Athens

He was also closely connected with a religious cult in his homeland. In fact he was a Priest of Halon - a minor Attic God of healing. When in 420 Epidaurus' great God of healing Aesculapius was adopted for the state cult, Sophocles sheltered the God in his home until a sanctuary was built. For this reason Sophocles himself after his death became a 'Heros', a bringer of blessing, under the name of 'Dexion' and was incorporated in the religious life of Athens. The Fates were kind to Sophocles for he died in the summer of 406 before he could witness the catastrophe of Athens in which he lived and had written his poetry. All that is known concerning his death is the statement by his contemporary Phrynichus, that he was, "fortunate in death, as he had been in life."

The Philosophy of Sophocles

From the Eighteenth Century come our general ideas about 'classicism', neo-classicism and the 'Greek spirit'. These terms practically defy definition and offer a lot of opportunity for misunderstanding and dispute. More than any other author Sophocles has suffered from terms such as classicism or neo classicism. Instead of being interpreted by his works, he has been somehow identified with all that is classical; and praised as both the prophet and example of those qualities of harmony, piety, and self restraint which we have come to look upon as "Greek".

In truth it was Aeschylus that was the theologian in his art, he was practically dogmatic; and Euripides was inwardly divided by the conflicting attitudes of the Sophistic enlightenment. Sophocles defied attempts to label him. His simplicity was put in a light of the mysterious which recalled the spirit of Greece. Sophocles illustrated the Greek spirit, while the Greek spirit explained Sophocles. It was his piety, which appeared so eloquently reinforced in public by his plays that recommend him as the last guardian of the myths (the special symbols of the Greeks) and won him a title practically the 'Defender of the Faith'.

To begin to understand Sophocles we need first to look at the stage of intellectual enlightenment during his lifetime - the 'philosophy' and the Sophistic Enlightenment. The Sophistic Enlightenment was a new way of thinking and had a great influence on the poets and the tragedians of the day. The tragedians were also known as Poets, for they wrote their plays as poetry. The growing demand for education in the 5th Century BC Greece called into existence a

professional class of teachers - the Sophists. The educational demand was partly for genuine knowledge but mostly reflected a desire for learning that would lead to political success. The most popular career for a Greek with ability was politics, so the Sophists concentrated on teaching rhetoric. The aims of the young politicians were to persuade crowds in what they wished them to believe. The search for truth or knowledge wasn't high on the agenda. For their services the Sophists weren't adverse to charging high fees, and they were the first to do so for teaching 'wisdom'. The Sophists weren't technically philosophers, they taught on any subject that was in demand. In the beginning they were teachers of virtue who were seen to be teaching the people the functions of the responsible citizen to the state.

Protagoras who appeared around 445 BC is considered the first Sophist. When ever Sophists appeared , and especially in Athens, they were enthusiastically received. Many people came to hear them speak, including the luminary statesman Pericles, the philosopher Socrates, and Euripides.

The early Sophists were seen as people with skill and wisdom, and were thought of with merit. Later they fell into disrepute due to the fact that Sophists were soon arguing on any topic, and their point was to win the argument they started. By being pretentious they sought to win over their audiences with all the rhetorical skills at their disposal. They would lead people into traps and paradoxes, attempt to confuse their opponents, use outlandish metaphors and so on. In general the latter day Sophists were being smart rather than truthful or earnest. Even in the 5th Century BC we learn from Plato that there was a prejudice against them. Aristotle in his time defined a Sophist as, "One who reasons falsely for the sake of gain."

The Sophists regarded divinity as a human projection. A primary view of theirs was the practical use of things and they gave up the nature of divinity or the world at large. They turned exclusively to human nature. Protagoras (a Sophist) stated that man was the measure of all things, and his contemporary Critias, who was a kinsman of Plato suggested years later in his play 'Sisyphus' that the Gods were invented by a skilful politician in order to frighten the mob into obedience. With divinity so neatly disposed of justice could be defined in practical terms of power and advantage.

Philosophers from the beginning had regarded divinity as the inevitable predicate of the functioning of the natural world. The Sophists generally treated divinity as one of the outgrowths of the far reaching world of convention, and that divinity could be useful in furthering personal or political goals.

The effect of the Sophist's 'Enlightenment' on the generations of Sophocles and Euripides was tremendous. What it did was open everything to debate. Euripides plays are full of nature versus convention debates. Euripides accepts the Sophists teachings about human nature and presents his disillusioned world in those terms. Yet he cannot let the Gods rest. Euripides was neither a pure Sophist nor a pure rationalist. His religious instinct caused him to constantly rebel against Sophist doctrine which he could not deny. He was no less concerned than was Aeschylus to see justice in the world and identify it with the Gods. This was no easy task for Euripides. The Gods with all their human invention and attributes certainly looked like a man made creation. Euripides was in a hopeless two pronged dilemma. In the end he gave it all up and wrote his masterpiece 'The Bacchae'. It was a homage to the God Dionysus of a beautiful but meaningless world without reason.

If Sophist rationalism tortured the mind of Euripides its effect on Sophocles was the reverse. Confronted with religious dilemmas he stood his ground and thought through the implications of religion as a human invention and man as the measure of all things. Sophocles

offered no objection to the idea that divinity was man made. He considered it man's greatest and most inspired creation, and that it demonstrated the heroic. So Sophocles stopped looking for justice in the Gods and he found it in the soul. He attempted no rationalisation that evil was part of a divine plan. This was very much against Aeschylus and the early physical philosophers who sought for a plan and the rationale of Godhood.

But what was it that shaped Sophocles, what were the historical circumstances? First of all it is important to remember that his period had many great minds, and many contrasting views. Just some of these were, Heraclitus, Anaxagorus, Xenophanes, and Socrates. Even Aeschylus and Pindar conceived their opposing schematised views of the international and exalted man. Sophocles himself went as a General to Salamis and in later years witnessed the destruction of the Sicilian Expedition. The Acropolis, the Aegina and the Olympia were all made in a few years of each other, and in Euripides the currents of rationalism clashed with the psychology and natural dynamism of the Sophists. In a hundred years all the elements of Greek culture met and coexisted. It was for all intents and purposes ended with the death of Sophocles.

Sophocles was a pious man, if not necessarily religious; and he lived in a time where there were many ideas and thoughts being expressed by his contemporaries. He certainly didn't see the Gods as directly interfering in the actions of mankind, yet they had a place as an ideal. He didn't accept Xenophanes' notion of the Gods, "If oxen and horses and lions had hands and could draw with these hands, horses would draw pictures of Gods like horses, oxen like oxen, lions like lions, and the Gods would resemble the bodies of each species." This anthropomorphised the Gods more than he would have liked. Anaxagorus' realist view didn't fit into Sophocles' view or purpose of divinity: "The Sun is a mass of fire and stone." We now know that Anaxagorus was basically right, but at the time the concept was too far removed from the everyday Athenian.

Heraclitus who is considered the father of dialectics expressed that he was an atheist and used to teach that everything existed and didn't at the same time; that all things in existence are in motion and fluid change, continually appearing and disappearing. As a humanist Sophocles believed that we had conscious choices and therefore couldn't agree with this outlook. The philosopher Empedocles claimed that we were all descended from the Gods but had been cast down due to wickedness and impurity. This would not have suited Sophocles for he saw that mankind was distinct from the Gods, and didn't agree that we had that history of divinity. Divinity was an ideal for mankind, not a heritage. Socrates put forward that he denied morality as a synonym for religion: "Human beings can be good without having to believe in the Gods." Socrates thus declared himself an atheist. This didn't agree with Sophocles' views on divinity nor his piety. Sophocles believed that divinity had a place, purpose, and a reality.

Philosophy and Philosophers

For a better understanding of what shaped Sophocles' thinking it is worth spending a little time on the flowering of intellectual and philosophical thought up to his time.

If there ever was a golden age of thought, it must have been in the Fifth Century BC in Greece and its colonies. Its epicentre was Athens. When we refer to Greece in those times it isn't in reference to a unified country, but a multitude of city states each competing against each other. Athens became the jewel in the crown for a brief, and yet momentous period. It's troubling to our modern mind looking back over 2000 years to think of reasons why these city states couldn't or wouldn't unify and create a Greek nation. Even when the Persian armies were invading their homelands, the ancient Greeks still found time to squabble and make war on each other. When

they did unify it was for brief periods of crises. When that was overcome they were back at it again fighting amongst themselves. There is hardly a period of ten years between the Sixth and Fourth Century BC where we do not find some war or another amongst the city states. Yet it was during this period that there was a flowering of the arts, politics, mathematics, architecture, sciences, and philosophy unequalled until the Renaissance. The flow on effects of this intellectual and artistic flowering helped trigger the Renaissance that led to the world we live in today.

So why there? Was it something in the water? There were other great, and older civilisations, the Egyptians, the Persians, the Thracians, the Syrians, the Phoenicians to name a few. The Egyptians for example were embalming mummies for thousands of years by this time, yet they had only the most rudimentary knowledge of anatomy, the Persians were cosmologists and mathematicians but had only rudimentary knowledge of astronomy and mathematics as we know it. The Phoenicians were the master sailors of their day yet had no maps. The numerous other civilisations had various religions, but no philosophy. It is almost like these civilisations reached a penultimate point and then stagnated. The ancient Greeks reached their individual zenith but couldn't unify, so they became consumed by emerging powers. Though they were consumed their legacy shaped the world.

The ancient Greeks were able to reach their intellectual and artistic heights because they lived in independent city states, and they had to compete against each other and other civilisations economically and intellectually. Where the Egyptians had one Pharaoh and one social system, the Persians had one King and one social system and so on. The Greeks had many types of leaders and leadership systems, there were different social systems, there was even different coinage - ranging from the Athenian 'Owl' made from silver or gold to the Spartan bar of iron. What unified them as a people was their religion and root language. It was only around the Sixth Century for example that they began to recognise themselves as Hellenes, and this was due to the fact of invaders. These 'Barbarians' helped the Hellenes recognise their similarities rather than their differences. Our word Barbarian comes from the Greeks as they said all those foreigners can't talk properly, all they say sounds like "Bar Bar".

The Greek religion was also fundamentally different, and this was due to their pre history. The Greeks didn't just suddenly emerge, they came from other areas as either invaders, settlers, or refugees. In those pre history times we see a feudal society thanks to Homer's 'Iliad' and 'Odyssey'. The world of Homer is full of Kings and Heroes, each an individual in their own right. Even when the Olympian Gods are mentioned they are not regarded with reverence, or sometimes not even taken seriously. The only difference between the Kings and Heroes and the Gods, is that the Gods are more powerful and immortal. In Homer's time it may be that a certain number of the Greek Gods weren't worshiped at all, and that some of them were personifications of natural phenomena, human passions, or long dead ancestors. It was very handy to be able to claim direct descent from a God. The word God in the times of Homer and before him also meant something different - an object of worship. It was through his writings that Homer began to obscure the meaning. It is by no means clear that all the Gods in the 'Iliad' are thought of as objects of worship, and it is only to a certain number of them that prayers and sacrifices are offered. When Achilles really prays it is not the Olympian Zeus but to a far off Zeus in Dodona.

By the Sixth Century the feudal society pictured for us by Homer had been replaced by the City States with a commercial aristocracy. Homer's verses were still recited in the market place but it was impossible to get away from the humanised Olympian Gods, and in practice it was of these that people thought when they worshipped at the shrines founded in earlier days,

when the Gods were still awful beings to be approached with dread. A people brought up on Homer could hardly think of Gods as moral beings, though they were the guardians of morality. About the only divine attribute they possess is power, and even that is there to safeguard against human omnipotence. So if the Gods are like us, how are we like the Gods must have been the question on many people's minds. If someone in the past can become a god or a demigod, than it stood to reason that anyone could if only they could discover how. To discover how one needed to ask questions and find answers.

With the various city states acting individually there could be independent lines of thought. There was no unifying clergy or religious dogma to obstruct intellectual pursuit. That the city states were relatively small they needed to trade with each other, and through trade routes ideas are carried. With the competitive nature of the City States, an intellectual idea would be discussed, torn apart, or perhaps improved upon and then carried back. If the question, "What is God, or what are the Gods" was ever asked it is a natural progression to then ask, "What is a blade of grass". For the ancient Greeks theological discourse rapidly progressed to physical philosophy, and that led to an overall flowering of philosophy probably unmatched to our times.

It was Plato's belief that no philosophical truth could be communicate in writing, only through some immediate contact can one soul could kindle the flame of another. It was through Drama and Tragedy, which brought the audience in an immediate contact with the soul of the author, that the three great Tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides expounded their philosophies.

It would be wrong to assume that the Greeks invented 'thinking', and its worth taking a brief look at some earlier efforts of thinking that brought about philosophy. The city of Miletus, one of the Ionian cities of Asia Minor (now Turkey), of the Sixth Century there lived a man called Thales. Miletus was a rich sea power with colonies and commercial links ranging from the Black Sea, to Southern Italy, to Egypt. It was a cultivated place, giving some people leisure. Aristotle was fond of claiming leisure as a pre-requisite for philosophy for some reason and he may be partly right. Rather than refute Aristotle altogether I propose that time free of physical labour gave people time for intellectual labour. The ancients were practical people, and they needed to be to survive.

Thales was a well travelled man and would have been acquainted with the works of observant star gazers in Babylon and Egypt. From them he would have learned of a monthly and yearly cycle that seemed to be characteristic of eclipses. There were certain years in which a eclipse was more probable than others. Thales became famous throughout ancient Greece by predicting an eclipse of the sun in 585 BC, just as the Lydians and the Medes were fighting a battle. This naturally added to the dramatic impact of the eclipse and both sides lay down their arms and made peace.

Given the scientific knowledge of the times there is no way that Thales could have predicted the time of the actual eclipse, it was a lucky guess. However that it was a guess doesn't matter. For all intents and purposes a man had predicted through thought and study something that was in the realms of the divine. If a man could do that then that phenomena couldn't be divine. What other phenomena then might not be divine? If Thales could do it then others could think and study to interpret or predict the world. Clearly thinkers were people to be reckoned with. Later Aristotle would divide these thinkers into groups, the 'Theologi' who saw the world as controlled by supernatural forces (today we would call them Theologians) and the 'Physici', naturalists who tried to explain an apparently disordered world in terms of simple and impersonal principles (Physicists would be our modern term). Thales, by predicting the eclipse gave the

‘Physici’ their best opportunity to break from the hegemony of the ‘Theologi’ and they didn’t waste it.

The big difference between Thales and his ‘Theologi’ precursors is that he gave understandable reasons for what he said. By reasoning things out things could be understood. So questions were asked and reasons were thought of and sought. Due to make up of the independent city states of ancient Greek times, if one wanted to disagree and refute that was acceptable, as to refute you needed to reason. All this reasoning began to build a body of knowledge. The ancient Greeks appreciated intellectual order and liked to establish it where ever it seemed lacking. One facet of this appreciation of order can be found in the way they wrote down their history. What Thales and others had confronting them was the religion or religions of the day. These religions for my purpose I shall class as primitive and it is here that we shall spend a moment or two.

The beginnings of religion

There is no known people without some form of religion. No matter how simple in way of life or thought, every group or society has held or does hold that there are forces outside of ourselves and the immediate physical world which affects our fate and with which we must retain relations in order to prosper.

In primitive and ancient religions, even though they may have varied quite widely, there are six basic elements.

- (1) They revolved around means of control of the outer world for practical ends, using the help of supernatural forces and weren’t overly concerned with control of our inner nature.
- (2) The supernatural force was always conceived as some all pervading force, and usually it was forces so it tended away from monotheism.
- (3) Philosophic formulations of the beginnings and aim of life are present but do not form any substantial core of religious thought.
- (4) Ethics had little to do with religion, but rested on custom and social control.
- (5) They’re non proselytising and remain private - for the members of the tribe or group alone.
- (6) Ritual is the most common means of communication with the supernatural forces or beings.

Ritual is in the forefront because direct action, rather than contemplation and reflective thought, was what was required in every day life to survive. Spiritual emotion could also be channelled into ritual behaviour. Many religious beliefs involved magic of some form or another and it was thought that performance of certain mystic rights, with our without prayer, would gain the desired result.

Religion to philosophy

As stated previously the ancient Greeks were a practical people. They had little time for fanciful myths, secondly they were industrious traders with many of them being travellers coming into contact with foreigners. Foreigners tended to have different myths and superstitions which encouraged the Greeks to reflect sceptically on their own beliefs.

Perhaps it was the prevalence of competitive public debate that helps explain how philosophy arose in Greece. The citizens of the various Greek city states were famously argumentative, and they regarded advocacy and criticism as the noblest uses of speech. Aristotle wrote in "Politics" that, "the power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient and therefore

likewise the just and the unjust." It shouldn't be surprising that in least some of the city states, the tools of disputation should eventually have been turned on the study of nature, and then towards other areas. It is also worth noting that when the philosophers spoke, it was to an ever increasing literate audience.

Alphabetic writing first arose in Greece in around the Eighth Century BC and was becoming widespread by the Sixth. This allowed everything that could be said to be written down. Things could then be made available, unadulterated and complete, for examination and criticism in ways a

preliterate culture could never do. That examination and criticism occurred is well known, for Diogenes writes in "Lives of the Philosophers" of one particular meeting between the (philosopher) Socrates and the (playwright) Euripides: Euripides asks Socrates what he thought of Heraclitus' (c.540-c480) writings and Socrates is reported to have replied, "the part I do understand is excellent, and so too is, I dare say, the part I do not understand..."

Sophocles would have been well aware of Heraclitus writings; some of which only fragments remains today - "You will not find out the limits of the soul by going, even if you travel every way". It is in Heraclitus that we first see the strings of psychology. He may have been the first thinker to regard the soul not only in the traditional way as a heavenly breath which animates the body, but also as something that does our thinking and perceiving. As his thoughts turned inwards he reflected, as we know from another fragment, "Man's character is his fate."

If any topics were the hot topics of the day, the question of "fate" would have been in the top five at least. Was 'fate' applicable to the Gods? Who was stronger, Zeus or 'the Fates'? Do we create our own fate? Do we have a fate, or are there numerous 'fates' that either we choose, blunder into, or create? The over-riding question would have been "Is 'fate' preordained"? It was these questions that Sophocles dwelled and wrote on. Ironically in yet another fragment, Heraclitus explicitly warns against trusting testimony of poets when it comes to 'things unknown'.

It wasn't just the tragic poets like Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus that were well aware of the of philosophers and philosophical thoughts of the day. In his play, "The Clouds" (first performed in 423 BC) the comic playwright Aristophanes makes the philosopher Socrates a central character in charge of a 'Logic factory', and the famous leader of rhetoric Thrasymachos was mentioned in his earliest play. It is safe to infer then that the audiences also knew of them. The philosophers of the day were alive and well and known, something that our modern philosophers are no doubt envious of. Its not impossible but hard to imagine, a modern Australian comic playwright using Peter Singer (who you may ask?) as the central character in one of their plays.

Let us look at some timelines, the approximate births and deaths of a few Philosophers and playwrights of ancient Greece

Thales: 640 - 546 BC

Aeschylus: 525 - 456 BC

Anaxagoras: 500 - 428 BC

Sophocles: 496 - 406 BC

Euripides: 485 - 407 BC

Protagoras: 480 - 411 BC

Socrates: 469 - 399 BC

Aristophanes: 448 - 380 BC

Come the year 500 BC and we see a great clumping of writers and philosophers together, and at times they were together in Athens. Protagoras for example is reported to have his first public reading of his work 'On the Gods' in the house of Euripides. The cross fertilisation of ideas and thoughts is hard to imagine, but for whatever it was the world is a better place.

Socrates and Sophocles

Socrates was alive and well in the times of Euripides and Sophocles. We have evidence that he knew Euripides and therefore it safe to assume that he also knew Sophocles. Socrates was the greatest thinker or philosopher of the day and amongst other things, he pondered on the question of what is 'good'. This would have also been on Sophocles' mind as he pondered over the philosophical and religious thoughts of the day, attempting to reconcile them with his own views.

We are left with no doubt as to what the term Goodness meant in those times. The Sophists professed to teach the goodness of a man and the citizen, and that was the art of managing states and families rightly, or what we would call efficiency. To the Greeks Goodness was always something positive. No Greek would have called a man good on negative grounds. However the political situation in Athens at the time confused the term, and this is best seen in Thucydides where he tells us that Antiphon, the chief contriver of the revolution of the Four Hundred was second to none in 'Goodness' (efficiency).

The Goodness of Socrates is identified with knowledge, and the relative value of true belief for political purposes. He distinguished "Philosophic Goodness" and "Popular Goodness". He held that it was the former that could be taught for it was knowledge, and nothing could be taught but knowledge. Popular Goodness was not based on any rational ground and therefore couldn't be counted on. The question for Socrates was, is it possible to regard Goodness as a purely neutral accomplishment or is it something that belongs to the very nature of the soul that possesses it; so is it impossible for the good man to do evil or to injure anyone? Therefore what is the knowledge with which true Goodness is to be identified? For Socrates it is the knowledge of what is good for the human soul.

In the "Giorgas" Socrates says that goodness is due the presence of arrangement and order in the soul, and that this can only be produced by knowledge, not by experience or routine. About fifteen years after the death of Socrates, Plato demonstrated in the "Republic" that there are three parts of the soul - the philosophical or reasoning part, temper, and desire. The special virtues of each of these are - wisdom, courage, and soberness, while justice or righteousness is the principle that keeps them all in their proper place. It is here that we see how the inner polity of the soul should be ordered. We see that wisdom should command, while temper assists in the execution of these commands, and how the desires should be confined to their proper task of supplying the necessary material basis for the rest, and how all this is to be secured by justice, which assigns to each its proper part and sees that it keeps to it.

Socrates' theory starts and ends with the soul. In the "Apology", Plato says that the most important thing in life is to look after its welfare. The soul he says elsewhere, is that which is, "mutilated by wrong actions and benefited by right ones". He doesn't mean the actions of others but those of yourself. To do good is to benefit your soul and to do wrong is to harm it. Nothing that other people can do to you can harm you enough to cancel out the benefit on yourself by acting rightly, and that bad people actually harm themselves.

Again from the "Apology" we read, "...nothing can harm a good man either in life or after death." Socrates points out that we should never return evil with evil, or to put in Christian

terms, we should turn the other cheek. This conflicted with the old Greek moral conventions, according to which it's all right to harm your enemy, though not your friends, and especially not your family. Instead of distinctions Socrates introduces a universal morality. What Socrates also meant was that you didn't have to wait for heavenly reward, or punishment. The benefits of virtue are immediate for, "to live well means the same as to live honourably" and "the just is happy and the unjust miserable". Socrates view was happiness and virtue are linked, which is why it's in your best interest to be moral.

To Socrates mind the successful care of the soul brings all sorts of good things in life but they may not be immediately apparent, and that there are all sorts of other satisfactions which cannot be obtained without the exercise of the virtues. For example, unless you exercise the virtue of moderation you will not enjoy good health, and probably deprive yourself of many future pleasures. So without exercising the virtues you cannot be happy after all. So leading a good life is linked to virtues, and they come as a packaged deal. One virtue cannot work unless another is present as well. Courage requires Wisdom otherwise it becomes rashness. All the other virtues are intertwined in the same way.

The virtue of Wisdom plays a special part. Without 'Wisdom' people will be unable to see the consequences of actions and not be able to tell right from wrong. Without Wisdom they will be unable to be happy, because every benefit that has potential to make you happy also has the potential to be misused and do the opposite. You need Wisdom both to reap the benefits of good things and to be virtuous. Accordingly if someone has any of the other virtues they must have wisdom as well because, being wise they will realise they cannot be happy without practicing all the other virtues as well. Anyone realising this, and who values their soul as any wise person must, will therefore try to avoid doing wrong. This explains why Socrates held that no one does wrong knowingly, if they do they're acting in ignorance.

This aspect of Socrates' philosophy can be seen in Sophocles' tragedies, and fits into Aristotle's view as well. In the "Poetics" Aristotle states, "Recognition, as the name indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge."

Sophocles' tragic heroes all move from ignorance into knowledge. This move may mean their physical destruction, but it also means the salvation of their soul. It is extremely difficult to even guess if Socrates and Sophocles saw the soul in the same way. What we can safely say is that both recognised there is something else within us that transcends the flesh and that whatever it is it has a purpose. One way of looking at the difference is that Socrates' idea was based on oneself. You wanted to save your soul by being wise, virtuous, and therefore doing good, and by doing so other 'goods' occurred. For Sophocles, the soul contained perhaps the hidden heroic ideal which could be brought out with knowledge of its existence. The soul that portrayed the heroic ideal was inspirational to others; it was a public statement where Socrates' was a personal one.

It should also be remembered that Sophocles was thirty years older than Socrates, and had different influences during his early years. As stated previously he admits the influence of Aeschylus in his early works. In Aeschylus' world view the Gods were real and had a definite place. Sophocles himself was a Priest of Halon, and sheltered the god Halon (probably a statue) in his home until a proper sanctuary could be built. To Sophocles the Gods were real.

It is difficult to see how Sophocles could reconcile himself with a pantheon of Gods, all supposedly with the 'heroic ideal' inherent in them with many of them not displaying it. Perhaps he chose to use them as examples of choice. If the gods have choices so do we. To maintain this view was against the growing tide of philosophical thought that there was one god. Socrates

himself maintained this view but never seriously attempted to anthropomorphise God. His view was a universal God with the relationship between the soul and God unclear.

Sophocles didn't need to anthropomorphise the Gods at all as this was already done. His view was that the soul didn't necessarily need an relationship with the Gods. By displaying the 'heroic ideal' the soul would become godlike, inspirational, and therefore achieve immortality. The closest analogy to our times would be the ancestor worship of some modern Asian religions - as long as one is remembered one is never dead.

Socrates, Piety and Virtue

Socrates was interested in the definition of 'piety'. His definition of piety was moral duty rather than the perhaps-pure religious definition we would place upon it today. What Socrates did was challenge the then currently held view that what makes a right action right is that the gods approve it. The problem was that in a polytheistic culture the gods are likely to disagree amongst themselves about moral matters. The Greek gods as the mythology proves, could hardly be called moral guardians. So an action could be right or wrong depending on the point of view.

To illustrate the point, Socrates posed the following question, "Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?" If right actions are pious only because the gods love them, then moral rightness is completely arbitrary depending on the whims of the gods. If alternatively, the gods love right actions only because they are already right, then there must be some non-divine source of values, which we might come to know independently of them.

To simplify it a bit we could say, do actions become right or wrong solely because of some authority's approval or disapproval. If this is the case, then because the authority has choice it is impossible to attribute moral wisdom to the authority itself. If however, the authority approves or disapproves of certain actions because they are already right or wrong independent of it, then the reason or reasons for making this decision must be accessible to us as well. Logically therefore we are capable of choosing between right and wrong on our own. What Socrates was doing was leading us towards a significant degree of intellectual independence. He believed that a general commitment to act rightly is fundamental to a moral life, and that truth alone deserves to be the basis for decisions about human action.

The ancient Greek notion of virtue (Arete) is that of an ability or skill in some particular respect. The arete of a potter is to make pots for example, and therefore arete would differ from person to person. Socrates looked deeper and was interested in true arete, which should be the same for everyone. When it was argued that arete is simply the desire to do good things, Socrates argued against this. He could have been that different people are unequal in arete and that it would also vary from individual to individual. However the desire for what one believes is good is universal since no person knowingly desires what is bad. Logically therefore differences in conduct must be consequential due to the differences in what they know. Socrates held the view that knowing what is right automatically results in the desire to do it. As can be seen in "Antigone" the question of piety and virtue (arete) are presented with artistic force by Sophocles. He wasn't looking for a definitive answer or involving his audience in any dialectic, but he was and still is making us look at the questions.

The Heroic Ideal

It was most probably Plato who laid down the foundations of philosophy called 'Objective Realism' (all things are merely the shadows of ideas) that came closest to Sophocles thoughts, if not his views. Plato argued that ideas are eternal while things are transitory. True knowledge comes neither through perception nor reason; or that man cannot know truth by means of science - but only through 'inspiration' arriving from the beyond. Plato's basic question, "What is the purpose of human life?" is the question that Sophocles gave the most thought to. The other question of course was that of the 'inspiration'. Sophocles didn't believe that the 'inspiration' would come from the beyond as this would have implied fatalism - intervention in human affairs from the Gods. He believed that the 'inspiration' would come from within - the heroic ideal.

In some cases he was closer to the thinking of the English philosopher over 1500 years later, John Locke. Locke believed that man was free to think of God in his own way. Sophocles never expressed it as distinctly but the fundamental idea was still there. If we apply the ideas of Immanuel Kant, that it's impossible to prove the existence of God through any normal means, we can see how through the use of the heroic ideal Sophocles attempted to invoke, if not necessarily to prove, the potential for some form of divinity or higher moral purpose in all of us. The heroic ideal may differ from individual to individual (as Sophocles never schematised what it should be). It was another later European philosopher, Spinoza, that put it distinctly, "Man is free to think and believe as his reason tells him." So God doesn't exist in the way religion preaches but only as an impersonal and spiritual principle, as a substance that constitutes the reality of nature. To a pantheist everything is God. Sophocles view could be that man is free to think of divinity as he wishes.

Sophocles put forward his views on divinity and the heroic ideal through his tragedies. It is difficult to say with precision what Sophocles views were on the concept of the soul, or eternal life. In his age of logic, myth and legend played a strong part. Would it not be logical then that if a hero and or the heroic ideal is remembered either in myth or legend that the individual (or the soul) achieves immortality? Where not the heroes of Homer still alive in the minds of the Greeks? They were mortals that had become immortal through their pursuance of the heroic ideal. This was the message that Sophocles had for his fellow Greeks. Aristotle in the 'Poetics' says in reference to the Tragedians, "Poetry, therefore, is more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular"

How could Sophocles discuss or enlighten the average Athenian about his concept of the heroic idea when many of them would be illiterate, or have no clear understanding of philosophical concepts and were most probably just trying to survive day to day. Tragedy was the vehicle to present his thoughts and philosophical outlooks. Tragedy would illicit an intellectual response and more importantly an emotional one. The emotional response was what Sophocles desired as this would stimulate the intellectual. A good argument or idea is only good until it's replaced with a better one, or a more convincing one as he learned from the Sophists. You don't necessarily feel and have to learn with an intellectual concept. An emotional response stays with you, and somehow you have to come to grips with it. The characters of Sophocles are confronted by the big questions and have to come to intellectual, moral, and emotional grips with them.

It was Athens that united the various thoughts and schools of Greek culture. The great statesman Pericles said that Athenians could enjoy the goods of all the places in the known world

without leaving their home. It was not just material goods the Athenians could enjoy, the intellectual goods were there also. Why was Athens so special? Many kinds of thought are not always productive, in many instances history shows us that they're destructive. What Athens had was a religion that could unify the people. This religion was a form of the heroic idea of mankind. The will of man was now free. One of the main prophets of this new aspect in Athenian religion was Sophocles.

To say that Sophocles was an outstanding advocate of free will however would be wrong. In his plays, he creates characters free of restrictions except for what he considered the most important - the moral one.

The Athenians aimed at their individual best. They may have created havoc with the debates on the meaning of Gods, but everyone believed and didn't question the value and dignity of mankind. Mankind was perhaps the only thing the Greeks were sure of. Such humanism formed the core of the Athenian genius in the age of Sophocles.

There is a contrast between Sophocles and Euripides. Euripides made himself the spokesman of the younger generation, with its trend towards naturalism, its veering alliances, its enthusiasm for war or war weariness. He is the spirit of the age with its restless scepticism, its sentimentalism, its unsparing questioning of old traditions, of religious usages, and civic loyalty. Euripides set himself outside of established institutions, and was prepared to criticise them. Every phase of the Sophist movement can be found in Euripides. Sophocles on the other hand maintained a level. The contemporary made little difference to his art. Euripides derided the official Gods and even introduced 'new Gods', 'Air' being one of them. The philosophers of the day looked upon all of this as 'causal' and 'creative'. Sophocles offered no new Gods and gave impressions of being reverent towards the old ones. In his plays, due to human actions 'Oracles' came true and the gods presence was felt. The great philosopher Aristotle admired Sophocles for his ethical teachings or for his deep religious intuitions, and for the unity of structure in his dramas.

Sophocles abandoned the theoretical for the psychological and turned from theology to morality. His emphasis is distinct and his own. He tried constantly to show the 'heroic idea'. The emphasis was inward centred wholly upon the individual who has in him or her the ability to create divinity. He found that divinity was in us and was in some sense the creation of our own moral being. That did not mean that divinity was an idle dream. It was to Sophocles an extension of the heroic tradition. If Sophocles was just an old fashioned pietist he could never have so fully rounded a dramatic vehicle in the lonely tragic hero.

Euripides is fascinating, and he was definitely more fully understood in his day. However in his day he wasn't considered 'decent', perhaps an 'enfant terrible'. He said in public what everybody thought was true but shouldn't be said in public. He set himself to re-value the stories of the Gods in the light of human motives and behaviour. He stripped the traditional tales and presented them as moral problems. Sophocles sometimes said things almost as bad, but he said them much more subtly. Sophocles heart wasn't on his sleeve.

Euripides, it is commonly said is a psychologist. He sees man torn from within. Sophocles was no less a psychologist except he saw man led from within. Euripides saw the many conflicts within man. Sophocles saw the one big conflict, the sustaining of moral and spiritual values in life. Euripides was only superficially a rationalist for underneath he believed in the meaningless compulsions, the Bacchanalian drives of an unhappy world. Sophocles thought differently on the subject of evil. Euripides and Sophocles illustrate the two opposites of 'Sophist

Enlightenment'. It is Sophocles who particularly seems to reflect the change that the Sophists brought in the problem of divinity.

Aeschylus laboured to establish the shape which the gods took in relation to the life of man. Sophocles looked away from this inscrutable question to the gods themselves. To Euripides the devaluation of the gods meant the devaluation of man, and he frequently identified the gods with the most destructive passion of humankind. Sophocles viewed the devaluation of the gods as a re-evaluation of human life from within. He did not confuse the issue, he focused on it, and returned to the very roots of religious thought. In doing so he asserted the divinity of the heroic soul.

Euripides said, "If the gods do evil then they are not gods", and his contemporary Critias argued that the most moral conception of God was only a vast projection of the human conscious; Sophocles certainly didn't believe them. Once you begin to anthropomorphise the gods there is no stopping it. Euripides didn't seem to understand this - Sophocles did.

Tragedy deals less dogmatically and more analytically with the problem of divinity, morality, and justice than did any other form of Greek literature. Euripides exclaimed, "In virtue I, a mortal, conquer you, a god". To Euripides that was a fact. To Sophocles that was a bitter and triumphal fact for he transcended that form of anthropomorphism where the gods satisfy human moral norms. Sophocles was more ready to identify the gods with eternal justice. He was interested in the immortality of the soul, and the only true vehicle for that was tragedy. His heroes pass from the world in their own struggles, led by moral strength into a sort of divine historical existence. They do not bandy about with God. Their triumph consists in the achievement of an eternal existence through moral strength.

With a more historical literary interpretation, one can see Sophocles in the context of his time, and to outline and explain the moral and religious content of his plays. Aristophanes called him "serene natured" and this serenity has been recognised in his art as well. This is surprising in view of the agonising intensity of some of his scenes and the disturbing impact of his plays as a whole. The serenity of Sophocles was that well known kind of self restraint which the Greeks called 'Sophrosyne' which we could translate to mean temperance.

Sophocles was pious about the gods, yet his plays offer no clear picture of the gods. There is no comprehensible theological idea such as the Athenians admired in Aeschylus; or as in Euripides who put forward the latest intellectual ideas. The God of Euripides was 'reason' and he needed to find the truth in everything. What Sophocles did in play after play was show that excess is evil, that man must not try to be a god; that not to be born is best, and that all things are insecure. He had schematised the commonplace into a serene and pious system of life that could be worded as Sophrosyne. Sophrosyne underwent various changes before it began to clearly mean "temperance" as in the eyes of Plato and Aristotle. The idea of Sophrosyne came from the Oracle at Delphi. The message of the oracle was 'Know thyself', and could have been worded prophetically, "You are mortal and not a God". This is clearly echoed in the 'Antigone' with her speech, "...I did not think your edict strong enough to overrule the unwritten unalterable laws of God in heaven, you being only a man."

With the exact implications of Sophrosyne behaviour varying, there remained a central idea that didn't vary. That was the idea of self knowledge. Socrates took the view of 'Know thyself' to mean 'Search thyself'. Sophocles studied the problem also but his findings were in the tradition of Homer rather than his contemporary Socrates. We can see this in his plays. In them we recognise how refined and true may be the understanding which the Sophoclean hero has of himself, and how the man who is acting a law unto himself in the eyes of the world is actually

obedient to a higher law which cannot be seen or perceived by those around him. In Sophocles dramas it is the hero who has self knowledge, the others merely have rules of behaviour. Sophocles focused on the morality that conflicted with Sophrosyne.

There was a simple formulae that the gods were just and if you crossed over certain limits of behaviour you were guilty of 'Hybris' (the opposite of Sophrosyne) and justly doomed. Allied to this belief is the search to exact guilt. This however is not always easy to determine. For many the divine forces were powerful. For Sophocles they were subtle. There may be a world order, but not one subject to simple moral rules; and it may in all senses actually be tragic.

For quite a period of time Sophocles plays were lost in an argument of sin and punishment. Then there was a period when academics claimed not the justice of the gods in his works but their power. What these academics failed to do was recognise the specific values he placed in man. All of this he was able to do with self restraint and a sense of serenity. In contrast to Aeschylus, Sophocles' characters are people not gods. It is Sophocles humanism that stands him apart. Aristotle in the 'Poetics' puts it this way, " There remains then the character....that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet, whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty." Sophocles was able to see, and portray the strength and frailty inherent in us all.

Let us not forget that Sophocles was pious but he did not have a religious dogma. In the dramas its impossible to believe that his characters were created merely to be knocked down by the gods. Sophocles should not be over simplified. He used mystery as part of his meaning and we have to consider this if we're to understand him. The mystery is based on the higher personal, not the social or the religious.

Attention needs to be paid to the play's hero. The moral nature of his position must be judged by the hero's own standards as they reveal it in the play, and the moral choices open to them in the action. What else to take note of is the recurring theme of 'knowledge to late' or 'wisdom and time' or 'shadow and reality'. Therefore it is possible to see the nature of Sophocles heroes as he conceived them, and about the tragedy itself.

It could be said its the nature of tragedy to ascertain the nature of the gods. The Athenians were never sure of the moral virtue of their gods. They were not always commendable; they lied, stole, committed adultery, and just about everything else. What the tragic poets considered was the treatment of man by the gods. The Greeks did not believe that all good comes from heaven. They weren't sure of where evil came from, especially the irrational evil which seemed to have no cause or moral meaning. It was necessary not only to face this evil, but also to explain it. It is safe to surmise that the doubt about the moral trustworthiness of their gods, the question of evil, and the ability of Athenians to argue face to face and not kill each other actually stimulated one hundred years of tragic poetry.

The Athenians took up this weighty matter of what constitutes evil with gusto. It could be said that this grew from the responsibility and moral issues placed upon the individual in the newly founded democracy. Yet the later work of Euripides 'The Bacchae' looked at mankind as some form of moral imbecile. The Bacchae is Euripides confessed failure to make life morally intelligible. Perhaps it was his honesty, and the fullness of his vision of evil which helped to create this masterpiece.

Emphasis has been laid down on the relation between the cult of Dionysus and the nature of tragedy itself, for tragedy looks for the inner springs of life whatever they may be, and Dionysus symbolises them in their evil as well as their good. It must be noted that Dionysus was never a God bound by moral responsibility as Apollo was. The question of moral responsibility is

and was fundamental to tragedy. We could say that tragedy was the antinomy between Apollo and Dionysus. A tension between what is morally and intellectually intelligible and what is darkly fascinating but destructive. Aeschylus was committed to the former and Euripides embraced the latter. So the question is, "Where is Sophocles?"

Sophocles did not neglect the problem and just concentrate on man. His humanism isn't so limited. In successive stages he faced the problem of evil in its most acute and disquieting forms. With the world developing around him and new religious ideas springing up, Sophocles could not help but to meet the challenges, raise the tragic questions; and answer them in his own terms - What justice is there for man? Where is the moral choice? To whom is man responsible? For Sophocles tragedy was far deeper than religious or political conservatism.

In his time the gods were anthropomorphised and becoming public figureheads. Sophocles decided that Divinity was elsewhere which he concluded logically from the realisation of man's moral responsibility. In his way Sophocles admitted that justice is within man; not the gods. Man is responsible for more than he dreamed; and it was these very qualities that brought man towards divinity. He never became allegorical, there is much that is fluid in his view of divinity and much of that can only be found in humanity. The task in his plays is not to crystallise it, but to show it.

Added to this humanism was the tradition of religious rationalism. Its concern was the nature of the gods. The aim was to achieve a scheme of theodicy where the evil of experience could be rationalised and adjusted to the idea of divine justice. The Greeks were not happy about leaving the gods inscrutable. For them, to try to know or understand God was in itself a religious act. This time also brought in two polarised concepts or ideas - pure Being and pure Becoming. For the Humanist Sophocles the idea was - we become through the choices we have and make to pursue the heroic ideal.

Sophocles and Law

The choices to be made came into contact with laws; religious and traditional, or current and changeable laws created by the society. Where and how did law begin, and how did law shape ancient Greece and Sophocles is what we must next consider.

Antigone won the prize and made such an impact on his audience and State that he was sent along with Pericles to suppress the revolt in Samis and help restore democracy, and later as a General over the seasoned veteran Nicias. Not all his appointments were due to the strength of Antigone as he had a large body of work, but the play must have struck some fundamental chords with the whole society of which he was a part. Besides Antigone showing the heroic ideal, the play is also about laws; divine or human. It is worth spending a little time exploring a brief history of law to assist us in comprehending the impact of Antigone 2500 years ago.

Now the word law means many things, and here I shall use it to mean a system of social rules, which a community or communities share. These social rules were for the benefit of the community, and usually had some form of punishment for breaches, or breaking of the rules. So where did these rules come from is the first question we need to ask. Alternatively we may ask, "Are there natural laws that all laws spring from?" The term 'natural law' assumes that there is a body of law setting a complete and immutable standard of judgement, and that knowledge of this body of law can be obtained by rational contemplation or by consulting divine revelation.

So you could sit around and think about it until you figured it out, or you would receive 'Divine' inspiration that would make it clear to you and through you, others. For the sake of

brevity I won't be dealing with "law" on a global scale, merely with the beginnings of law around the Mediterranean.

The effect of the evidence derived from comparative legal practices is to establish a view that the early condition of the human race was a Patriarchy. This is originally based on the Scriptural history of the Hebrew patriarchs in Lower Asia.

The eldest male parent (the eldest ascendant) is absolutely supreme in his household. His dominion extends to life and death, and is as unqualified over his children and their families as over his slaves. Indeed the relations of sonship and serfdom appear to differ little beyond the higher capacity which the child in blood possesses of becoming one day the head of the family himself. The flocks and herds of the children are the flocks and herds of the father, and the possessions of the parent, which the patriarch holds in a representative rather than propriety character are equally divided at his death among his descendants in the first degree, the eldest son sometimes receiving a double share under the name of birthright, but generally endowed with no hereditary advantage beyond an honorary precedence.

A less obvious inference from the Scriptural accounts is that they seem to show us traces of division which is first effected in the rule of the parent. The families of Jacob and Esau separate and form two nations; but the families of Jacob's children hold together and become a people. This looks like the immature germ of state or commonwealth, and of an order of rights superior to the claims of family relation.

"They have neither assemblies for consultation or themistes, but everyone exercises jurisdiction over his wives and his children, and they pay no regard to one another". These lines are applied to the Cyclops, and could be viewed as part of the practices of a Barbarian race by Homer. The verses of Homer condense in themselves the sum of hints which are given to us by legal antiquities. Men are first seen distributed in perfectly insulated groups, held together by obedience to the parent. Law is the Parent's word.

We have the clearest indications that society in primitive times was not what it is assumed to be at present, a collection of individuals. In fact, it was an aggregation of families. The contrast may be expressed by saying that the fundamental unit of an ancient society was the family, of a modern society the individual. These 'families' were in a modern sense small independent corporations, and the interplay between them would have been most probably ceremonious, because the transactions to which they pay regard would resemble 'international' concerns much more than the interplay between individuals.

Primitive law considers the entities with which it deals, that is the patriarchal or family groups, as perpetual and inextinguishable. This view is closely allied to the peculiar aspect, in very ancient times that moral attributes present themselves. The moral elevation and moral debasement of the individual appear to be confounded with, or postponed to, the merits of the offences of the group to which the individual belongs. If the community sins, its guilt is much more than the sum of the offences committed by its members. The crime is a corporate act and extends in its consequences to many more persons than have shared in its actual perpetration. If, on one hand the individual is conspicuously guilty, it is the children, the kinfolk, the tribe, or fellow citizens, who suffer with and sometimes for, the perpetrator. So it happens that the ideas of moral responsibility and retribution often seem to be more clearly realised at very ancient times than at more advanced periods. For as the Family group is immortal, and its liability to punishment indefinite, the primitive mind is not troubled by the question which becomes a problem as soon as the individual is conceived as altogether separate from the group. One step in the transition from the ancient and simple view of the matter to the

theological and metaphysical explanations of later days is marked by the early Greek notion of an inherited curse. The trilogy of plays, “Agamemnon”, “The Libation Bearers”, and “The Eumenidies” (commonly known as ‘The Oresteian Trilogy’) by Aeschylus are fine example of this inherited curse.

The elementary group is the family, connected by obedience to the highest male ascendant. The aggregation of families forms the Gens or House. The aggregation of the House makes the tribe. The aggregation of the Tribes constitutes the Commonwealth.

We can be certain that all ancient societies regarded themselves as having proceeded from one original stock, and even laboured for comprehending any reason except this for their holding together. The history of political ideas begins with the assumption that kinship in blood is the sole possible ground of community in political functions. In early commonwealths, citizens considered all the groups in which they claimed membership to be founded on common lineage. Yet, each community preserved records or traditions which distinctly showed that fundamental assumption was false. Everywhere we discover traces of passages in history when men of 'alien' descent were admitted to, and amalgamated with, the original brotherhood. In Antigone there are references to the adoption of others into one's family: Tieresias to Creon, “You shall have given a son of your own loins to death”, and, Chorus to Creon, “Sir would you take her from your own son's arms?” Both lines showt that this is Creon's son being referred to, not anyone adopted into the royal house.

The composition of the state uniformly assumed to be natural was artificial. This conflict between belief or theory and fact illustrates the efficiency of ‘Legal Fiction’. The earliest and most extensively employed Legal Fiction was that which permitted family relations to be created artificially. If this Legal Fiction had never existed how could any of the primitive groups absorb another or combine, except on absolute superiority on one side and the absolute subjection on the other. In Classical Greek times the best (or worst) example of this is the complete subjection of the Helots by the Spartans.

The conclusion that we can draw is that not all early societies were formed by descent from the same ancestor, but assumed that they were.

At some point of time, probably as soon as they felt themselves strong and secure enough these states (or Families) stopped to recruit. They necessarily therefore became Aristocracies and a fresh population could no longer put in any claim to the community of origin. By Family I don't mean family as it is understood in the modern sense. The ancient Family was constantly enlarged by the absorption of strangers within it's circle by 'adoption'. The Legal Fiction of Family simulated the reality of kinship that neither law nor opinion made the slightest difference between real, and adoptive connections.

When we first look at very early Greek society wisdom would keep alive the father's power, even after the father had grown old and physically feeble. Later in a more mature Greek society with jurisprudence the 'Father rule' advances a few steps on the Homeric literature; and though many traces of stringent family obligation remain, the direct authority of the parent is limited.

On Codes

The most celebrated system of Jurisprudence (Law) known to the world begins and ends with Codes. It is without doubt that many jural phenomena lie behind these codes and preceded them at some point in time. Our best sources of knowledge are the Homeric Poems, not as a

history of actual occurrences but as a description, sometimes idealised, of a state of society known to the writer.

The earliest notions of law or rule of life are those contained in the Homeric words "Themis" or "Themistes". Themis appears in the later Greek Pantheon as the Goddess of Justice but this was a later development (and Homer used Themis in a different sense, as the assessor of Zeus). In those early times people could only account a sustained or periodically recurring action by supposing a personal divine agent. So the wind blowing was a person and of course divine, as was the sun rising, or the crops growing. As such in the physical world was the moral. When a King decided a sentence, the judgement was assumed to be from direct divine inspiration. It needs to be clearly understood that these were not laws, but judgements. Zeus wasn't a lawmaker he was a judge.

Similarities of circumstances were probably more common in the simple mechanisms of ancient societies than what they are now. Therefore succession of similar cases judgements were likely to follow and resemble each other. It is here that we have the rudiments of custom. The concept of custom is later in time than that of Themis. The notion of custom must precede that of judicial sentence, and that a judgement must affirm a custom or punish its breach. The literature of the Greek heroic age show us law under Themistes, and a little more developed in the concept of "Dike" (Judgement or Custom). "Nomos" or law that term so often used in ancient Greek political vocabulary doesn't appear in Homer.

In very early times it was supposed that a supernatural presidency or power kept together all the important institutions - the State, the Race, and the Family. As people grouped together in the differing relations to those institutions, to celebrate different rites or offer common sacrifices, they would perform similar duties. Various purifications and expiations would need to be performed to evade punishment through involuntary or neglectful disrespect.

It is with some certainty that we can say that in those days of mankind's infancy there existed no sort of legislature, not even a distinct author of law. Law had barely reached the footing of custom. It was more or less habit. The only authoritative statement of whether something was right or wrong is a judicial sentence after the facts. There was no presupposing law which had been broken. Perhaps it became one for the first time by a higher power which breathed it into the Judge's mind at the moment of decision.

On Kings and Aristocracy

Heroic Kingship depended partly on divinely given prerogative, and partly on the possession of above average strength, courage, and wisdom. Gradually the impression of the King's sacredness became weakened due to weak Kings. So royal power decayed and gave way to the power of Aristocracies. These consisted of a number of families united by an assumed relationship in blood and claims to a quasi sacred character. These Aristocracies very soon became either political, military or religious. However the authority of the King was not generally superseded. The result was a King enjoying great power but limited due to the aristocracies of Priests, Politicians, or the Military.

On Custom

These Aristocracies became the universal depositories and administrators of laws. They succeeded to the prerogatives of Kings with the important difference that they did not

pretend to have divine inspiration for each sentence; except perhaps within certain Priesthoods. Soon they became an oligarchy that claimed and monopolised the knowledge of the laws, and had the exclusive possession of the principles by which quarrels are decided. It is now that we have arrived at Customary Law. Customs and Observances now exist and are assumed to be precisely known to the Aristocratic orders or castes.

Before the invention of writing and during its infancy an Aristocracy invested with judicial privileges formed the only expedient way by which accurate preservation of the customs of the race or tribe could be approximated to or maintained. It was insured that for the customs to remain genuine as far as possible that they be recollected and or divulged only to other members of that cast or Aristocracy.

Codifying Law

From that period of Customary Law we come to another turning point in the history of law. It is the era of Codes. The various Codes made their appearance at fairly much the same point of relative progress of each community. The ancient codes were doubtless originally suggested by the discovery and diffusion of writing. It is true that many of the Aristocracies abused their monopoly of legal knowledge, and that their exclusive possession of the law was a great impediment to the success of popular movements which began to become universal in the Western world. The Aristocrats would become Tyrants, and without written laws and or punishments for breaching them laws could once again become arbitrary serving the interests of the Aristocracy. A major turning point was putting the laws in written form and placing them in public places.

What these written Codes did was publicise the law and offer security for its preservation far better and more efficiently than the memory of any group of people. Codes or laws could now be put in a systematic arrangement. The early Greeks became experienced in the art of law making. The Laws of Solon are an example as are the Laws of Draco that they superseded.

The Greeks of Sophocles' time had a definite view on the validity of their body of laws, and this is best expressed by Pericles, "Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighbouring states; we are rather a pattern to others than imitators ourselves. Its administration favours the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy. If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences; if not in social standing, advancement in public life falls to reputation for capacity, class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit; nor again does poverty bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition. The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There, far from exercising jealous surveillance over each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbour for doing what he likes, or even to indulge in those injurious looks which cannot fail to be offensive, although they inflict no positive penalty. But all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless citizens. Against this fear is our chief safeguard, teaching us to obey the magistrates and the laws, particularly such as regard the protection of the injured, whether they are actually on the statute book, or belong to that code which, although unwritten, yet cannot be broken without acknowledged disgrace."

Tyrants

In regards to Antigone it is difficult to analyse Creon without examining the Tyrant. In our era the word has certain connotations, which the ancient Greeks would have found initially surprising. However by Sophocles time many would have agreed with us. Let us spend not too long looking at what a Tyrant was, and how they came about.

In the Seventh Century BC the Polis or city underwent changes with brought about two major developments

- the gradual rise of the non nobles and the formation of a new military structure
- the rise of the individual.

It was the economic and political changes during the seventh and sixth century BC that led to the creation of the Tyrant (Tyrannos). If we look at the story of King Midas who could turn everything he touched into gold we have the roots of our answer. The myth of Midas has a historical foundation, and the impact of the foundation was huge. Midas was a Phrygian Merchant Prince. It was the Phrygians that invented coinage. Midas was able to use his financial power to gain the throne. Others followed suit. The 'money made Kings' were different from the Kings of the past and they had a new name - Tyrannos.

Previously Kings were made by either common consent. This was due to their prowess in leadership, or by their control of property and or the means of production. The Kingship became hereditary in some instances, and in such cases the King still controlled property or the means of production. Kings rewarded people with either honours, material goods, or property. Though property was still under control of the King the one granted such land could live off it through taxation and the labour of the local peasants directly responsible to him. In return the one honoured would still be required to pay a percentage of the taxes to the King and fight the King's wars with the peasants serving as troops. A situation similar to serfdom in Europe.

When material goods were given by the King, or exchanged among other people for other materials they were of indeterminate value. It all depended on what was to be exchanged, the quality of each product, its scarcity and so on. Due to all of this trade had its limitations and frustrations for the emerging merchant class. Coinage changed all that. Originally coinage was stamped with the emblem of prominent merchant as a guarantee of value. Coinage was able to standardise where exchanging a silver or gold pot didn't. Coins soon penetrated everywhere. As coinage spread merchants began to challenge the political privileges of the old nobility who drew their power from birthright and ownership of land. Of the early Tyrants several are known to have belonged to the merchant class.

In ancient Greece the development of the Tyrants was slower than elsewhere for the early Greeks played little part in colonial expansion which required a fair degree of freedom of trade, and consequently the internal struggle for land became more intense. Freedom of trade meant freedom from the control of the nobility. They in turn saw the economic basis of their power being undermined by money. Faced with the competition of the merchants the nobility and landowners recouped themselves by intensifying their exploitation of the peasantry. By doing so what they did was drive the peasantry into the hands of the merchants (or the 'nouveaux riches' as we would call them today) and to call for a redistribution of land. The merchants were able to use this agrarian unrest to extort concessions for themselves.

It is interesting to note that both the merchants and the peasants had a common interest, but it was the peasants that suffered most acutely from the introduction of coinage (money). The nobles believed that landed wealth came from God and was therefore honourable and enduring. (Actually landed wealth came to them via other means but how this came about is beyond the

scope of this paper.) Wealth won by trade is man made and therefore hazardous and unstable. The worst landowners of all were not the nobility but the merchants themselves. The nobility's ties to the land and peasants were steeped in tradition and custom. This wasn't the case with the merchants. With no traditional or customary ties to the land they managed them on a purely commercial basis. Merchants were able to acquire land either as speculators (buying out the impoverished, including impoverished nobility). For one of the first effects of money had been the alienation of land, or for merchants to marry into noble families and so secure lasting political privileges.

For the ancient Greeks the first real crises came early in the Sixth Century BC. The peasants were on the verge of insurrection. The lowest class were permitted to only retain one sixth of their produce, which forced them to borrow seed for the next harvest, or even for food. They were then targeted by usurers whose rates of interest were as high as 50%. If they couldn't pay they were forced to sell their land, or their children, or themselves. The nobility saw that if they were to avert a peasant revolt they had to enlist the cooperation of the merchants who were also worried about the threat to their property. So Solon a member of the nobility who was engaged in trade was given dictatorial powers.

The effect of Solon

Solon relieved the economic pressure on the peasants with the minimum of change. He cancelled outstanding debts, prohibited enslavement for debt, and managed to side step the demand for a re-division of land. He didn't do anything to change the interest rates. So the peasant was still prey to the usurer. This was most probably his intention for as long as the peasants were attached to the land they weren't available to the merchants as cheap source of labour. This was a factor of great importance for the merchant class at the time when the industrial exploitation of slave labour had hardly begun. It was around this time that the Athenians began to exploit the silver mines of Laurion, and the main source of labour would have been the peasants driven off the land. He also gave the working class a voice in the government by reviving the popular assembly, which had fallen into decay. This had a far reaching impact.

It was this body that elected, though not from its own members, the Archons (leaders) and other officers of state. Side by side with this Solon also created the Council of Four Hundred (nobility and land owners), from which the working class was excluded. The Popular Assembly could only vote on resolutions placed before it by the Council. His motive was to put a check on both bodies. The people who gained most from this were the emerging middle class. One thing that Solon demanded and was granted that Archons couldn't just be elected by right of birth i.e. from the old nobility. It was now based on ownership of land. This meant that wealthy merchants could now become Archons by investing in land, and this was a substantial breach in the monopoly of power held by the nobility. Within a generation the wealth in personal property began to grow and the aristocratic front began to crack. Noble families began to involve themselves in trade. This forced these two classes into competition with each other for the privileges of wealth and power. The nobleman Peisistratus was able to bring these elements together in his third attempt to seize power in Athens, but only after he was able to exploit the resources of Thracian silver mines which gave him greater monetary power. With money he was able to hire mercenaries.

The function of Greek tyranny was transitional. By forcing and holding a breach in aristocratic rule it enabled the middle class to consolidate its forces for the final stages of democratic revolution, which involved the overthrow of tyranny itself. That is why in Greek tradition it was almost unanimously condemned. It was renounced by the democrats because it had become reactionary. Behind it all there lies the consciousness of the treacherous mobility of money. There were however other changes that had a direct influence in the creation of the Tyrannos.

The Phalanx

During this time there was an interrelation of politics and military service which led to a change in tactics and make up of the fighting forces. What came about was the Phalanx. The phalanx consisted of heavily armed and armoured troops, fighting at close quarters, and dependent on each other for their own safety, and victory. As it took money to buy arms and armour (you had to supply your own). The members of the phalanx (Hoplites) were generally from medium sized farms or estates that could afford the expense and the time. The Hoplites were a new type of soldier, trained in strict discipline (they replaced the single combatants of Homeric times, and also to some extent the cavalry of noblemen).

This brought together a group of people who could identify with each other, depend on each other, and make possible the survival of their city state. It also gave these landholders political and economic power. The noblemen might have the cavalry but they needed the phalanx to win the war. So there came political, social, and economic differences into the Greek world with the creation of the phalanx. This opened the way to a new type of political thinker.

Political individualism developed out of tensions in social life. Many people would have been looking for someone to provide a new and better way to meet their needs. It was either common sense or ambition that would bring about new forms of political leadership. There was a need for the ordinary peasants to be no longer the victims of arbitrary justice handed out by the Aristocrats. The first remedy as previously mentioned was the codification of law. The codification contained the current customary law (mostly favouring the nobles) but being codified and made public they helped prevent a good deal of injustice. Occasionally even the nobles were either sensible enough or compelled to acknowledge this new development. The old system of family feuds and revenge killings was taken away and a growing legal supremacy of state and it's officials made good sense. However important the codification of law was, it proved insufficient to satisfy the rising class of non nobles, to solve the difficult economic problems they faced, and to create an atmosphere of safety they needed.

The rising classes needed a stronger authority and one that could unify domestic and foreign policy, give social peace, and prosperity. In various cities the opportunity was taken by individual leaders, strong personalities who gained power by usurpation. These people became known as 'Tyrants', and the word was synonymous with King - it had no implication of cruelty. Most of the Tyrants were quite good and brought about social and cultural progress to their respective States. The hatred actually sprang from the Aristocrats, who felt the impact of a popular leader.

The Tyrants themselves were mostly members of the ruling classes themselves, but their power was based on the support of Mercenaries and the popular support of the people. In particular they helped the peasants in their economic difficulties. Let us not forget that they were ambitious men who aimed at personal power, but generally they combined such aims with the

interest of the state. It was the immediate dangers of social upheaval and economic failure that helped the Tyrants seize power. Sometimes the parties involved in the power struggle came to agreement amongst themselves to elect an arbitrator (Aesymnetes) who was to find a solution that both sides could consent to. The distinction between Tyrant and Aesymnetes wasn't always clear. As a general rule the Aesymnetes was appointed for a fixed period. Aristotle in 'Politics' called Aesymnetes an "elective tyranny".

The great Solon was clearly elected as a mediator, and he expressly refused to become a Tyrant, though he was a 'Lawgiver'. We have therefore three different names - Tyrant, Aesymnetes, and Lawgiver - for a position which in all its forms reflected the same historical phenomena: the rise of the political individual in the ascendancy within the state. The work of the Tyrants, Law Givers, and Aesymnetes had a tremendous effect on the development of the state or polis. Previously there was a form of Aristocratic solidarity, now this became weakened. Each Polis began to develop its own distinctive personality. The Tyrants could shape or mould a Polis, but no matter how strong they individually were, the Polis was always stronger.

By Sophocles' time the term Tyrant to an Athenian audience would have meant pretty much the same thing as to what it means to us today. How this came about is where we go next and revisit Peisistratus.

Three Tyrants

Peisistratus seized the Acropolis in 561-562BC after being granted a bodyguard by official decree of the assembly. He made himself a Tyrant. He didn't do a good job of it for he was expelled twice. It was during the second expulsion that he went into exile around Macedon and Thrace and was able to exploit some gold and silver mines. With his new found wealth he built ships and hired mercenaries. So after invading and defeating his opponents, he had the money to fight poverty and strengthen his position in the city. He turned out to be a great statesman and his power was never again questioned. He maintained Solon's laws and constitution, though he did manage to put his friends and family in high office. He gave farmers peace and security and his policies in general were of reconciliation, as well as cultural and economic progress. His time was looked upon as a 'Golden era' by the later democratic Athenians. He tried by all possible means to raise the living standards of the people. This couldn't have happened if Democracy hated Tyranny. Peisistratus died in 528-527 and was succeeded by his sons Hippias and Hipparchus.

Things were going along quite well under the two up to the time that Hipparchus was assassinated. The assassination wasn't even directed against tyranny as such, but the consequences were immediate and far reaching. Hippias rule became extremely harsh and oppressive. Citizens began to 'disappear' in the night or summarily imprisoned and executed. If you're interested in what led to the assassination I would refer you to Herodotus 'Histories' book 5 (55) and Thucydides 'History of the Peloponnesian Wars' book 6 (56).

It was Cleisthenes, the head of the Alcaemonids clan with the help of the Spartans that finally ousted Hippias. The Spartans were always hostile to Tyrants so they didn't need much encouragement. Cleisthenes had help also with a fellow called Isagoras who represented the Aristocracy. Cleisthenes was to show that he was a man of new and radical ideas - he was democratic and helped shape the new Athenian political system. Hippias escaped and made his way to the Persian court where he was instrumental in persuading Darius the First to make war upon the Greeks. Hippias came with Darius when they landed at Marathon in 490 BC but any

hopes of restoring himself in power were finished by the Greek victory at the Battle of Marathon.

So to the Athenians Tyrants became the embodiment of what Hippias had become, cruel, oppressive, and treacherous.

Athenian democracy in the Fifth Century BC rested upon the unity of classes and the validity of the human mind in perceiving justice and law. No limit was set to the potential of the individual. The plays of Sophocles do not set him apart, they are the embodiment of the Athenian spirit. Now let us look at “Antigone” in light of philosophy, the heroic ideal, Tyrants, and law.

Previous to the play.....

After Oedipus the King of Thebes discovers that he killed his father and married his mother and had four children by her; Eteocles, Polynices, Antigone, and Ismene, he blinds himself. His mother and wife Jocasta has hung herself as well upon the discovery. Creon his uncle and brother in law expels him from Thebes. Oedipus then sets out to Colonus a town in Attica where he was cared for until his death by Antigone. The sons of Oedipus agreed to stay in Thebes and rule in alternate years, and while one was King the other should leave Thebes. One particular year while Eteocles was King, Polynices went to Argos and married the daughter of King Adrastus.

Eteocles now decided not to relinquish the throne at the year’s end and Adrastus musters an army to restore Polynices, his son in law, to the throne. The army of Argos attacks and is defeated and during the battle Eteocles and Polynices battle together, and kill each other. Now Creon becomes King.

“Antigone”

In ancient times Antigone was a favourite, it captured the prize and on the basis of its excellence Sophocles was elected to a Generalship in the Samian War. His task, as a General was to capture the city and restore democracy. It is highly doubtful that Sophocles played part in any commands. It is more likely he was there as an inspiration to the warriors and to be a ‘moral guide’. So it can be quite safely assumed that Antigone must have captured some chord of the Athenian spirit. In Antigone Sophocles seems to have emerged entirely as his own person and he would return throughout his life to the house of Oedipus for his profoundest inspiration.

The house of Oedipus was to Sophocles what the house of Atreus was to Aeschylus. Aeschylus’ trilogy which was composed towards the end of his life is a rich paean of progressive humankind, evolving its personal and political morality under the pressure of time and suffering. The Theban plays of Sophocles form no such trilogy, but they begin where Aeschylus ended. For Antigone, she is the model of heroic individualism.

What Sophocles saw was Athens at her probable peak and the ever increasing necessities of imperial policy were creating a world where institutions and ideologies (not people) would soon be the protagonists. With her unshakeable perception of divine law Antigone is the embodiment of the heroic individual in a world whose institutions cannot change but have usurped a right to existence from the citizens. For Antigone, every moment of life is tragic and Sophocles chose to show not the steps in the process but the irreconcilable issues.

Sophocles had a very good reason for having a woman pursuing the heroic ideal, and to be the pivotal point in the ensuing tragedy. In his time the personal liberty, social, and political

responsibility of men had greatly increased. However this growth did not extend to women. Sophocles' humanism couldn't see how the qualities of men that made Athens great could be absent in women. By having Antigone the tragic heroine he was going against the patriarchal and patronising view of Greek women by Greek men.

Honour or death, or both?

Antigone is a play about a woman who defies orders because she believes them to be wrong. She is prepared to do what she believes is right irrespective of the personal cost. She is going to give her brother Polynices proper burial against the King's orders. In the times of the play and the times when it was originally performed it was Greek religious custom that the dead be given proper burial. It was the next of kin who had the primary responsibility to do this. What Antigone states clearly by her action is that blood ties and custom take precedence over temporary rivalries and or laws. She also knows that this will cost her life.

In ancient Greece the dramas were performed at the festival of Dionysus, so they were religious events. Honouring the gods required recognising their power; they were immortal, possessed great power and knowledge, while all things human were transitory. Mortals had to learn their limitations and virtually every surviving drama brings out the distinction between us and the gods. Antigone states that the law of the gods comes first and it is the duty of every individual to recognise this. Perhaps what made this such a ground breaking play is that the person who loses life for piety is female and the violator of the gods laws is male. The ancient Greeks didn't permit women to vote or involve themselves in Government for their place was in the home and here we have a woman being incredibly and forcefully public in displaying her piety and customary righteousness.

Everyone thinks that Creon's decree is wrong but are afraid to do anything about it except Antigone. Even her sister Ismene is frightened to help, though she believes Antigone's actions to be justified. The Chorus are reluctant to become involved, and all they do is decline to assist Creon in enforcing the decree. They are fearful of the consequences of doing what they believe is right as is Ismene. For the Chorus there is also the curse of the house of Labdacus to contend with. She is a member of a doomed family, and the curse of the gods exacts justice for crimes committed in the past and do not necessarily spare the innocent. They may take some solace in this, but they can distinguish right from wrong. However they are living in the 'real' world where the 'right' are not always rewarded.

Antigone challenges Creon on the grounds of moral principle, citing the will of the gods who dictate that the dead must be buried regardless of sins in life. This is an inconceivable political act - for a woman to defy a King and to claim her proper social role as next of kin. Then to further defy Creon's decree that she must die, she commits suicide. This suicide initiates a chain of events that is beyond Creon's control. Soon Creon's wife and son are also dead. From Sophocles' point of view her suicide wasn't nihilistic or pathological. It was the only way for her to restore her honour and dignity.

The play reveals the ideological and ethical motivations for Antigone's actions or revolt. These are not only reflected in Antigone's own words but in the action of the other characters. Following her lead, Haemon, Ismene, Tiresias, and the Chorus openly oppose Creon's law. By her actions there is a social awakening, a raising of consciousness that reflect the principles of Athenian democracy. It is Antigone's grief, her rage, her sense of righteousness, and the suicides that are engendered that represent the very nature of the public and the private, the personal and

the political, that is common to all human existence. Whoever, like Creon, wants to separate these two spheres of existence, cannot go unpunished.

Antigone and Ismene

In the opening scene of the play we are presented with Antigone expressing the heroic ideal counterpointed with Ismene who portrays a woman as she should be according to Athenian custom. It is also reminding the audience in the very first lines of the curse on the house of Labdacus.

Antigone: ...You know how heavy the hand of God is upon us; and how we who are left must suffer for our father, Oedipus;...

King Laius (the son of Labdacus) ignores the oracle's warning that one day his son would kill him. When a son is born he is taken to Mt. Cithaeron where he has the boy's feet pierced with a nail and tied solidly down. Laius in this way would not be directly responsible for the boy's death. The boy's fate was in the lap of the gods, so if he died of exposure or because he was torn apart by wild animals it wasn't Laius' doing and therefore he wasn't affected by 'blood guilt'. This son is Oedipus, who unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother. The heavy hand of God that Antigone is referring to is the curse on Laius for ignoring the oracle, then on Oedipus, and now on them. The gods sense of justice in ancient Greece extended not only to those directly guilty, but could be and was in some cases generational. The audience would have been well aware of the Oedipus story and the curse. Some of the more traditionally pious may have even agreed with it and it is here that Sophocles introduces a twist by shifting away from the gods' curse to human affairs.

Antigone: Have you heard this order, this latest order that the King has proclaimed to the city? Have you heard how our dearest are being treated like enemies?

In her first major speech we hear the issues that Sophocles chooses to examine through his tragedy. The issues are, religion and piety, custom and law, tyranny and freedom, honour and dishonour, and the ability (or necessity) to choose between them.

Antigone: Our two dear brothers...Creon has given funeral honours to one, and not to the other...

The religion of the time was based on rituals. An extremely important one was the burying of the dead. The act of performing these rituals was one of the few cases where women could act publicly. Perhaps an even greater fear than dying for the Greeks was that there would be no one to mourn for them at their funeral. With these few words Sophocles is at the heart of the matter, and in such a way that every member of the audience would have been shocked to recognition. Their religion and custom demanded proper burial and mourning, and this is to be denied.

To highlight the importance of burial and mourning I'll give three examples; during the Peloponnesian wars three Admirals were put to death for failing to retrieve the bodies of some drowned sailors during a storm. Over a hundred years later when Alexander the Great was a Prince, his father King Philip of Macedon allowed the return of Athenian dead to Athens to facilitate a peace treaty. If comrades could carry a corpse home they would; even the Spartan mothers would say to their sons going off to war, "Come back either carrying your shield or on it." This wasn't just a way of saying don't be a coward as it also stressed the importance of returning so the family could properly mourn and bury.

It was also important to be buried in one's own city. To be buried outside the city's boundaries was the fate of traitors and stateless people. The fate of Eteocles is even worse as Antigone clearly states

Antigone: To be left unburied, unwept, a feast of flesh for keen-eyed carrion birds...

This is a punishment not just to Eteocles but to Antigone and Ismene

Antigone: It is against you and me he has made this order.

Now the God's punishment may cross from one generation to the next, but it there wasn't any man made law at the time that crossed generations in Greece. A law such as this would harkened back to the Laws of Draco and even beyond them. (For most offences under the Laws of Draco the punishment was death). The very foundations of Greek democracy and liberty would be rocked by such a law, and as Antigone states this law is to be enforced and the punishment for breaking it is death. The question Antigone asks at the end of her speech to Ismene

Antigone: Now is the time to show whether or not you are worthy of your high blood

is a question to the audience. Are they worthy of the legacy of their fathers who fought and died for democracy, liberty, and the continuation of their religious beliefs? To condense it Sophocles is asking; Freedom or Tyranny, you choose. There is no middle ground, there can be no fence sitting by the audience and this is clearly shown by the following brief exchange

Ismene: You cannot mean...to bury him? Against the order?

Antigone:...I shall never desert him, never.

On the surface it is through Ismene that we see the acceptable version of a Greek woman of the day. On another level she strikes at the very ideal of democracy now in the mind of the audience.

Ismene: O think, Antigone; we are women; it is not for us to fight against men; our rulers are stronger than we, and we must obey in this, or in worse than this...I can do no other but as I am commanded; to do more is madness.

On the superficial level Ismene is merely parroting what is expected from a woman who is not allowed to vote, be involved in Government, or affairs of the state. By changing just a few words the full political implications of her speech become abundantly clear (apologies to Sophocles for the following) "O think, people, it is not for us to fight against the Tyrants or Kings, our rulers are stronger than we, and we must obey in this, or in worse than this." The implication on an audience that fought to preserve their freedom and won against the most powerful nation on earth at the time (the Persians) wouldn't have been lost.

It is with Antigone's next speech that the idea of divine and state law is introduced. Quickly and precisely the important issues are being presented. As shown previously the gods and religion were an important aspect of Sophocles' life. If his views on what the gods were was never properly reconciled his view on their purpose was. It is here that we see the juxtaposition of law, divine and mortal, and we are forced to choose as Ismene did.

Antigone: ...I will bury my brother; and if I die for it, what happiness! Convicted of reverence..."

The question this begs of the audience is, how can one be convicted of reverence? Considering it was the accepted religion of the people and the state its an absurdity. If such a thing can happen then it must be that the law of the state is fundamentally wrong. In our modern era you could say that the law is the law but that doesn't mean it's just.

Antigone: We have only a little time to please the living, but all eternity to love the dead.

This line links to "Go your own way" previously in the speech, and later to "...live, and defy the holiest laws of heaven". For Ismene to 'go her own way' means both to betray the family and to reject the gods. The analogy for 'all eternity to love the dead' is that the soul is immortal and can

therefore be punished forever. Ismene's choice to please the living is damning her soul for eternity. Here we can see the influence of Socrates ideas of the soul on Sophocles.

In Greek religion up to that point a sin could be done away with through ritual. (To not perform the necessary rituals was also considered a sin.) A good example is from Euripides' Medea after she has killed the children and is confronting Jason: Medea - "...I will ordain an annual feast and sacrifice to be solemnised by the people of Corinth, to expiate this impious murder..." So though a double infanticide is a heinous crime and impious to the Gods, they're willing to forget all about it as long as you have an annual festival. You don't even have to feel sorry you did it. Sophocles is quite clearly stating that this is no longer the case. You are responsible and will be held accountable (which links to Socrates concept of the 'good' of the soul). For the traditionally pious in the audience this would have come as a shock. To emphasise the point Antigone finishes with

Antigone: ...and defy the holiest laws of heaven.

and it can't be much clearer than that. It is Antigone who claims that a higher law limits temporal authority. Through Antigone Sophocles forces us to examine the question of justice versus law and the legality of authority.

As much as it would have rocked the religious sensibilities of the audience the ending of this scene also challenges the social. Family was the basic unit in ancient Greek times, much as it is today. The families made up the tribe, and the tribes made up the polis or city or state. This new law has divided the family. It is destroying the very foundations of Greek society.

Ismene: I do not defy them; but I cannot act against the state. I am not strong enough.

What hope does the individual have against the power of the state? The question is just as important to day as it was then. Ismene sees herself alone, or even with Antigone without popular support. Self preservation is an important driving force and it is easy to understand Ismene's fears. What good would her death do? She doesn't wish to be a martyr as she sees such an act as merely throwing her life away.

In Euripides' Medea we hear the Nurse expressing such sentiments, "...To have learnt to live on the common level is better. No grand life for me, just peace and quiet as I grow old. The middle way, neither great nor mean, is best by far, in name and practice. To be rich and powerful brings no blessing; only more utterly is the prosperous house destroyed, when the Gods are angry." Ismene wants the middle way, the 'Sophrosyne' that should be pursued according to the ideals of the time. Yet Sophocles would poignantly show that women are equal to men when it comes to terms of individual valour or self sacrifice as in this case there can be no middle way. He also wasn't scared to use historical examples either but we will look at those when they arise in the play

Ismene desperately seeking the middle way certainly doesn't suit Antigone. Fear of death doesn't daunt her either. She knows well in advance what her punishment will be and hopes for a martyr's death.

Ismene: ...I'll not betray your secret...

Antigone: Publish it to all the world! Else I shall hate you more.

In the concluding dialogue of the scene Antigone implies she hates Ismene (as in the line above) and then again a little later

Antigone: Oh, I shall hate you if you talk like that! And he will hate you rightly...

If she did hate Ismene, then we could have a shorter scene. What Antigone is doing is trying to emotionally blackmail Ismene into assisting her, to share the burden, the responsibility and the punishment. In her first lines of the play we heard, "...there is no pain, no sorrow, no suffering,

no dishonour we have not shared together, you and I...” Now for the first time the sisters will be alone to meet their prospective fates. Being alone, or an outcast, without family or polis was indeed a frightening thing; perhaps more so than death itself.

Antigone believes that her death will be viewed in light of her beliefs

Antigone: ...no punishment can rob me of my honourable death.”

and therefore possibly atone for the guilt of, and curse on, her family. She alone will be the one to save the family name. An honourable death would be inspirational to others. Yet this law of Creon’s affects no one else. Antigone sees the law as a direct attack on her, and symbolically against the gods and customs. Her honourable death she sees as symbolic too. It is Ismene who tries to close the rift between them, a rift not of their making but forced upon them. It is she who still tries to hold the family unit together if not physically at least emotionally.

Ismene: ...remember that those who love you...love you still.

This must be some comfort to Antigone for her nearest and dearest still believes in her, and therefore believes in the righteousness of her actions.

The Proclamation

We now meet the Chorus made up of Theban elders and they recount the history leading up to this with all the nationalistic fervour at their disposal. What all this ‘flag waving’ by the Chorus does is set the scene for what is to come next, and also to give us an insight into their thinking. The line to note is

Chorus: ...the son of Menoeceus, whom the gods have appointed for us...

for they’re saying all has been the gods will or plan and so is the ascendancy of Creon. Where the previous rulers went against the gods and were duly punished here’s a man who owes the Gods his piety. For all intents and purposes (in their minds) the city of Thebes is now free of any curse or wrath from the divine.

Creon’s first public decree is to have a state funeral for Eteocles who died defending Thebes, and to leave Polynices unburied to be eaten by dogs and vultures as a warning to all who harbour treachery. For Sophocles the point of Creon’s decree is its unorthodoxy. With the decree Creon is granted an air of patriotism - but we shall cast a different view upon this later. What Creon didn’t do was reckon on Antigone, who holds the orthodox view. With her it’s not a question of political correctness or right, but of human right. To Antigone the dead deserve to be buried and it is her duty to give her brothers his. There is no conflict in her mind for love and duty are one.

If there is a conceptual contrast in Antigone, it is the contrast between true and false authority, between the ideal citizen and the lawless ruler. Given the situation in which a high minded girl defies a royal edict it would have been easy for Sophocles to make her pathetic. He chose not to. She is a sharp speaker, and equal to Creon. She is at war from the very beginning to the bitter end. Antigone’s very qualities have tended to throw some sympathy on Creon’s side. It also raises the issue that a King has a right to decide what to do with traitors for the good of the state. Sophocles forces us to examine the question of justice versus law, and the legality of authority.

Creon’s speech is fascinating. It is hard to argue against the logic of it. It calls for unity after a civil war. It is a speech that is designed to bring all the people together to pursue the common good. The speech is so good that the Greek statesman Demosthenes would use it over

100 years after the death of Sophocles to rally the Greek people together against King Philip of Macedon. Now let us look at the speech in more detail.

Creon: My councillors...I have called you out of all my people to conference together...

The first thing to note is that they're his Councillors, and Creon hasn't called all the people. As he's a King he could attempt to rule outright but he needs unity among the nobility to rule all the people. By using the word 'conference' he allows them to think that there is something to discuss, that they have influence, and political power. He then delivers a litany of names to whom they gave their allegiance - Laius, Oedipus, Polynices, and Eteocles, all descendants of the house of Labdacus - as he is.

Being a King is a difficult task and not everyone can do it. Creon alludes that perhaps he is unsure of his own ability and will need guidance

Creon: No other touchstone can test the heart of a man, the temper of his mind and spirit, till he be tried in the practice of authority and rule. For my part, I have always held the view, and hold it still, that a King whose lips are sealed by fear, unwilling to seek advice is damned.

which would have pleased the Councillors no end. Here is no Tyrannos but a man who has been thrust into greatness unsure of his abilities. Their collective wisdom will help him steer the ship of state. All seems fine in the Theban court.

Creon: And no less damned is he who puts a friend above his country

Considering that there was nothing worse than a traitor things are suddenly looking fantastic. Creon is saying that if he doesn't listen to his Councillors he should be treated as a traitor. Such humility from one so powerful is a rare jewel indeed.

If Creon hopes to unify the people he will also need religious and legal unification. He now publicly show his piety by making an oath. An oath was an extremely serious undertaking, more so than just saying "I should be damned" he is now saying "I will be damned".

Creon: As God above is my witness, who sees all, when I see any danger threatening my people I will declare it.

So Creon will declare economic danger, social danger, legal danger, military danger and so on. A more scrupulously honest and caring King one couldn't wish for. Considering what Thebes had just been through, and what the audience knew of their local situation regarding the incessant fighting amongst the city states they could have hardly argued against the next line either

Creon: Our country is our life; only when she rides safely, have we any friends at all. Such is my policy for our common weal.

It must be remembered that the city state and immediate surrounds made up one's country. The word country then doesn't mean what it means today.

Creon's proclamation about Polynices would have met with resistance. It was custom to have the bodies of the stateless, traitors, and enemies outside of the city walls. It was also custom to bury them. The Athenians buried the dead Persians after the battle of Marathon on the grounds that piety required it. A traitor, as Polynices was, might be denied burial in his homeland, but not burial itself. The people of Athens would have seen Creon's proclamation as cruel revenge, illegitimate and patently tyrannical. They would certainly be feeling confused between the start of the speech and its finish. Is Creon to be benevolent and conciliatory or a Tyrant?

The Chorus, representing the Councillors (or Theban Elders) may be optimistic and well pleased with the future. They have their established role and a pious King that will listen to their collective wise counsel. They believe that Creon thinks like they do

Chorus: ...so for us who remain your will is law.

Now this line could be read in such a way that the Chorus already know him to be a Tyrant but that wouldn't make sense regarding the following exchange

Chorus: What other duty then remains for us?

to check their collective optimism

Creon: Not to connive at any disobedience.

This response to the Chorus would have been unexpected if the 'your will is law' meant that what you believe or want is already law. They were expecting Creon to ask them to advise him or something like that. Now he shows his true self and firmly puts the Chorus in its place. The translator of the Penguin Classic E. F. Watling uses the word connive for a reason. It is strong and evocative. It implies pre-existing suspicion by Creon.

Let us look at two translators on the same dialogue - italicised and underlined is E. F. Watling for Penguin, bolded will be Richard Emil Braun for Oxford Press.

Creon: See then that it be kept.

Creon: Think of yourselves as the guardians of my pronouncements

Chorus: My lord, some younger would be fitter for that task.

Chorus: You have young men you can put on that duty

Creon: Watchers are already set over the corpse

Creon: No, no! Not the corpse. I have guards posted.

Chorus: What other duty then remains for us?

Chorus: Then what are your orders?

Creon: Not to connive at any disobedience.

Creon: Not to side with the rebels.

That Creon suspects treason is more easily read in the Braun translation. In reality the opening speech by Creon serves two purposes, it throws the light of orthodoxy to the people, and it is letting them know that the orthodoxy Creon is expecting includes their total allegiance to him personally. The Chorus now know that the penalty will be death for disobedience to Creon's will. For the audience this would have harkened back to the days the Tyrants, and the laws of Draco. A most unsettling experience and one that would set the tone for the remainder of the play.

The Sentry

The first to feel the wrath of Creon is the Sentry who brings news of the secret burial of Polynices

Sentry: Why hurry to your doom poor fool...if Creon hears this from another man you're head's as good as off.

The poor man with the bad news is at the whim of Creon's power and has only one vestige of hope; that is through divine or natural law.

Sentry: And whatever I suffer, it can't be more than what God wills, so I cling to that for my comfort.

The Sentry knows too well the suspicious mind of Creon and as he delivers his news to allay Creon's suspicion of him

Sentry: We were amazed...the corpse was covered from sight - not with a proper grave - just a layer of earth - as it might be the act of some pious passerby...

which is a reminder to Creon that his law is not pious or in keeping with religious custom. A law such as this is going to be almost impossible to enforce for as the Sentry says

Sentry: ...for anyone might have done it.

Now though the Sentry is speaking about his fellow guards over the body, and how they even started to accuse each other but that no proof could be found. The implication that ‘anyone’ might do it would not be lost on Creon.

The ‘anyone’ could also mean everyone is against the order. This is re-enforced by the Chorus

Chorus: ...that this may prove to be an act of the gods.

The Gods themselves may not bury the body but may command someone to act as their instrument. Even if the Gods do not act as such there is still the religious custom and law that demands the dead be buried and not to do so would be sacrilegious to the piously minded. It is here that Creon now shows how far he has gone. He sees himself as not only the supreme temporal authority but also the harbinger of the gods will. Creon is not the only one to suffer under this delusion, Antigone does as well, but we shall explore that later.

Creon: Blasphemy, to say the gods could give a thought to carrion flesh! Held him in high esteem I suppose, and buried him like a benefactor - a man that came to burn their temples down, ransack their holy shrines, their land, and their laws?

What he doesn’t realise is that by stating he knows the god’s will he too is guilty of blasphemy and sacrilege; for as the Chorus previously stated, “the father of Heaven abhors the proud tongue’s boasting”. So sure is Creon of his divine knowledge that he dismisses the notion of the gods having anything to do with the burial completely, and in doing so denying the religious or piously minded as well. He states his view with crystal clarity

Creon: There’s a party of malcontents in the city, rebels against my word and law...they are the people, I see it well enough...who have bribed their instruments to do this thing

It is during this speech that we see Creon become the ‘Tyrannos’ that became loathed in Classical Greek times. When a law has been broken whether it is just or unjust, it is still broken and the perpetrator is punished. Now we see that if Creon’s law is broken, punishment will be meted out irrespective of guilt or innocence. With no one to blame he will now punish the innocent, the use of terror isn’t beyond him. The Sentry is to become the victim

Creon: ...either you find the perpetrator of this burial and bring him here into my sight, or death - no, not just your mere death...but for a living lesson against such infamy you shall be racked and tortured...

The Sentry maintains his innocence to no avail, he states obliquely that if Creon should kill him he will die for no good reason

Sentry: To think that thinking men should think so wrongly

which does him no good at all. The only recourse left to him is to try leave Creon’s presence and make his escape.

Sentry: Once free who never thought to see another day, I’ll thank my lucky stars, and keep away.

He is expressing what everyone would be thinking. It would be better to become a refugee (and this would be a terrifying thought to a people so closely connected to their polis or city) than to live under the constant fear of death. Creon’s harsh law is actually undermining the stability of his city and society. In his blind rush to bring stability he is actually destroying it.

None of this has been lost on the Chorus for they can foresee the destruction of their society under this tyrannical rule. The Chorus begins with a glowing litany of man’s achievements, and the great potential inherent in us

Chorus: ...there is nothing beyond his power...for every ill he hath found its remedy, save only death

that reminds us we're not omnipotent, we're mortal. It is in the following that we hear how the people are thinking of Creon and others like him

Chorus: O wondrous subtlety of man, that draws to good or evil ways! Great honour is given and power to him who upholdeth his country's laws and the justice of heaven. But he that, too rashly daring, walks in sin in solitary pride to his life's end, at door of mine shall never enter in to call me friend.

It is worth noting here that 'man' draws to good or evil ways. Sophocles makes it plain that the gods are not intervening, we have choice and must accept the responsibility of that choice. He also makes it plain that there are two laws; the earthly and the divine, and that it's important to uphold both. We are all on the razor's edge in this regard. How to follow two laws, and contradictory laws in this case, is the dilemma for the audience to ponder. If Creon was unjustly worried about 'malcontents' in the city he is justified now. He has created what he most fears.

Antigone and Creon

Re-enter the Sentry with a poignant line

Sentry: My Lord, an oath's a very dangerous thing. Second thoughts my prove us liars.

Creon's public decree over the penalty for burying Polynices is for all intents and purposes as good as an oath. To break an oath would bring retribution from the gods and in Creon's case it would seriously question his validity as a ruler. It is a 'dangerous thing' for the oath or decree was made before all the facts were known or the consequences envisaged. Euripides would forewarn people in Medea with the line, "the unexpected the gods make possible" in regards to being absolute about anything. Now Creon is faced with the unexpected - that the 'party of malcontents' is none other than his niece Antigone. Even though the Sentry goes into detail as to how the deed was done it is incredulous to Creon. He has to hear the admission from Antigone's lips before he can believe it and even with her admission he cannot understand why.

Creon: And yet you dared to contravene it?

Antigone: Yes. That order did not come from God. Justice that dwells with the Gods below knows no such law, I did not think your edicts strong enough to overrule the unwritten unalterable laws of God and heaven, you being only a man.

With these few lines Creon, for all his power, is found wanting. The belief that the individual contains insights into justice, divine and political is typically Athenian. It was on this assumption that Athens built her democracy. However with Antigone she is in a world that no longer believes, she is isolated and her moral insight is not rewarded but punished by the figure of state. What Sophocles did was show that divine laws exist and gain existence through the action of the heroic idea. Antigone perceives laws and defends them with her life. Creon does not now conflict directly with divine law, he conflicts with Antigone. The divinity which is involved isn't a static or external entity, but is organic and given weight by Antigone's will and sacrifice. Antigone's speech is a guide for, but not the only path, for a good citizen.

If we go forward in time Antigone speaks as loud and clear today as she did 2500 years ago. Origen (185 - 254 AD) a follower of Clement of Alexandria and the father of the Eastern Church recognised the word of God as the ordering principle of the cosmos, "...there are two types of law set before us. One is the law of Nature which is such as God would enact. The other is the written law of cities. Where the written law is not opposed to the law of God, it is good that citizens should not forsake it on the plea that it is foreign to them. But where the law of Nature and of God ordains what is opposed to the written law, then consult your conscience.

It may be that the innermost Word will tell you to bid farewell to what is written and to the will of the lawgivers. Then give yourself to God and choose according to his Word even at the price of being scorned and subjected to every conceivable danger and tribulation". Though these words were written over four hundred years before the birth of Christ, they have greatly influenced our modern world. It is worth noting that among the founding fathers of the United States of America there was one man who made a profound study of Origen; that man was Thomas Jefferson.

It is the glory of her deed that drives Antigone. She has the full measure of self destructive heroism, and more besides. Her vision of the divine law on which every government must be formed give her a greater dimension. Is it true that her self willed nature destroys her? The answer isn't simple. Both Creon and Antigone see themselves as the interpreters of the law of Heaven. In assuming this both are wrong. Yet on who else's will could Antigone rely on? The chorus fail to see the moral destruction Antigone would meet if she followed the decree, but they perceive something deeper. It is this recognition that stops them from joining her cause. However Antigone is right in that Creon's law does defy a law of Heaven but whether it is one of the holiest laws is another question. By assuming to correctly interpret the laws of heaven Antigone is guilty of the sin of pride, of which the Chorus commented on previously, "...too rashly daring, walks in sin in solitary pride to his life's end...". For all her virtues Antigone is ignorant or unwilling to recognise her fault (or sin) of pride. It is the Chorus that recognise this in her Chorus: She shows her father's stubborn spirit: foolish not to give way when everything's against her.

This line could also be interpreted as the Chorus being sycophantic towards Creon if one is to disregard their historical context. Antigone is not the only one who is stubborn and "foolish not to give way" as we know through Oedipus, and as we will see later with Creon. In the translation by Braun the line reads,

Chorus: Clearly she's her father's child, hard and raw. He never learned to yield, for all his troubles.

Creon too, should learn to 'yield'.

Instead Creon now displays both his power and paranoia. He makes it abundantly clear to all that he is the supreme power of the state, and power is not something to be shared. It can only be won or lost

Creon: Proud thoughts do not sit well upon subordinates

Then he begins to address his niece Antigone, the daughter of King Oedipus, as a menial. His quickness to anger, his rejection of criticism, his suspicious nature, his resentment of women and his wanting of their servitude all show him as a tyrant. He is subtle in that he professes 'good order' and 'obedience to law'. For him there is only one right therefore it is no surprise that Antigone is beyond his comprehension.

Antigone has moral fortitude. She doesn't go to far, for how far can one go resisting tyranny? Creon is an illustration of pride going for a fall, yet there is a tragedy about him also. His tragedy, whether he is right or wrong confronts us. Sophocles was interested in his fate, and wants us to be. Creon has his own honesty, his own justification, and his own sense of responsibility. But what he is or is not isn't the whole story. Antigone makes no sense until we realise that there isn't one central character but two. Antigone's tragedy is foreseen, swift and terrible. Creon's grows ominously before us - skilfully crafted by Sophocles.

What Creon does is to begin to isolate himself from those around him. Antigone is his niece and family connections will not save her. As shocking as it might have been to have

Antigone brought before him, he knows he has little choice but to carry out the order of death. To do otherwise would completely undermine him and his authority.

Creon: My sister's - ay, where she even nearer, nearest and dearest, she would not escape full punishment...

What Creon does next is extraordinary. Ismene is now his target

Creon: ...and her sister too, her partner, doubtless, in this burying...

though all evidence and Antigone's confession show her the sole perpetrator. I don't think Sophocles wanted to have a Creon that was suffering from paranoid delusions, but rather one that is pushed to extremes by circumstances. Again the whole reason for Creon's action is to preserve the state as he sees it should be preserved. If the malcontents are just the remaining family of Oedipus it is best to destroy them all. A city that has just witnessed a civil war isn't going to be too upset over two more deaths. Law and justice can be pushed away for political expediency. Yet he cannot state that is his reason as such, it must be 'clouded' in law.

Creon: Often the thoughts of those who plan dark deeds betray themselves before the deed is done

Though Ismene has no broken no existing law, a new one has now come in force - To think against the State. In Creon we see that if power corrupts then absolute power corrupts absolutely. This message by Sophocles couldn't be stated any clearer.

Enter Ismene

The following scene with the entrance of Ismene is complex, Antigone now realises that her family will be destroyed, Ismene's realisation that without Antigone the family is as good as destroyed, and it hinges on Creon's inner turmoil over the betrayal by his kin with his last shreds of justice. It is Antigone that sees first Creon has gone too far in condemning the innocent

Antigone: Now you have caught, will you do more than kill me?

which is basically asking him if he's going to punish the innocent for her 'crime'. Once again the Braun translation makes this very clear

Antigone: You have caught me. What more do you want? Isn't killing me enough?

Creon: No, nothing more; that is all I could wish.

Antigone: Why then delay...

and she then follows up

Antigone: All these would say that what I did was honourable, but fear locks up their lips. To speak and act just as he likes is a King's prerogative.

Creon cannot escape the logic of Antigone's words but he cannot accept the fact that if he continues down this course with Ismene he won't be seen as a just ruler, but as a ruthless tyrant. The argument between them that now follows about who is an enemy and who isn't is an argument in very different spheres. Creon's is on loyalty to the state and Antigone's is on loyalty to family. It isn't surprising then that there is no clear answer. Yet Antigone's is the more convincing and it does effect Creon. He recognises in himself (through her words) what would be his preferred option

Antigone: My way is to share my love, not my hate.

which he cannot take up. If he recognises within himself any agreement with Antigone he must dismiss it. To not do so would make him weak when he needs to be strong for the salvation of the state. He can't deny his feelings so he must subdue them. To do so he needs to ridicule the truth of what Antigone has said and he does so with another 'set of laws'

Creon: We'll have no woman's law here, while I live.

He is beginning to crack under pressure and has to turn to more extreme measures to justify his actions.

Women in ancient Athens had no role to play in politics or affairs of state, they were Athenian second class citizens. This wasn't always the case though. Before the idea or construction of the polis women were much more to the fore. Sophocles is hinting at the Greek past where there existed matrilineal societies. The evidence of this was still in the Athenian property laws. However with changes in rural to urban, agrarian to manufacturing, self sufficient to market dependant, the role of women steadily changed and the men became dominant. Was it all for the best or could there be things to be learned from "woman's law"? Here he spells it out for his audience - piety, family responsibility, the ability to self sacrifice - are all "woman's law" and have no place in the State. If that is so; then how can these things that we admire in Antigone be bad? For Creon the answer is simple rejection as we see with the entrance of Ismene.

The attack on Ismene is immediate

Creon: You crawling viper...Two traitors unbeknown plotting against my throne...

and yet there is doubt. Creon must be feeling uncomfortable with his decision to condemn Ismene out of pure suspicion. He could have sentenced her to death with Antigone but he doesn't. He gives her an opportunity to show her allegiance, but the response is

Ismene: I did it - yes - if she will let me say so. I am as much to blame as she is.

Her answer shocks Antigone as much as it does Creon. If Antigone was expecting a passive Ismene she certainly didn't get it. Now Antigone is faced with a dire predicament. If Ismene is to share her fate then her 'house' will truly be destroyed. If we look back at the beginning scene between the two after Ismene asks Antigone to be 'secret', Antigone's response is "Publish it to all the world! Else I shall hate you more". Now this could be read on face value as a petulant rejection of her sister, or with a deeper meaning that by 'publishing' it there can be no blame placed upon Ismene so she would escape any punishment. Antigone may want to die for what she believes in, but she doesn't necessarily want anyone else to die for it with her. She places all culpability on her own shoulders.

Antigone: No. That is not just. You would not lend a hand and I refused your help...

It is Ismene who now knows where 'true duty lies' and that is with her sister. What she couldn't do for her brother she can do for her sister. Ismene now is happy to accept her fate, showing true love of her sister. In the first scene Ismene chose 'life' over 'love'. She has since come to the realisation that life without love isn't worth living. It is Antigone that must now publicly reject that love if she is to save her

Antigone: ...I have no friend whose love is only words

and to Creon she must show that Ismene was totally incapable of defying his order and that his suspicion is groundless

Antigone: You shall not claim that which you would not touch. One death is enough

and she tries to indicate to Creon that Ismene is no future threat

Ismene: How can I bear to live, if you must die?

Antigone: Ask Creon. Is not he the one you care for?

and she offers Ismene a last chance to save herself

Antigone: Help yourself. I shall not stand in your way.

If Antigone is to realise anything its to that there is a gulf between her and her sister. Both are of the same blood but not of the same mould. Antigone sees herself as a leader, one who stands by

her actions to the death; and she now sees Ismene as a poor frightened girl whose death will serve no higher purpose.

It is now Ismene who feels the terrible burden of a life of loneliness. She tries desperately to save Antigone

Ismene: ...the strongest mind cannot but break under misfortune's blows

to no avail. The only way to escape that is to have Creon kill her too. Her ability to cope with the situation is gone and the only recourse open to her is to die. If she wishes to die Creon is at first instance happy to accommodate her wish

Creon: ...when you threw your lot in with hers

Ismene: How could I wish to live without my sister

Creon: You have no sister. Count her dead already.

It is here that we see the absolute desperation of Ismene to save Antigone. What she does in divulge a secret so powerful that it must rock Creon from the ground up

Ismene: You could not take her - kill your own son's bride?

In the Braun translation the line reads, "Do you mean to kill you will the kill the girl you promised your own son would marry?". I believe that Braun is incorrect; Creon never suspected Haemon to be betrothed to Antigone. It is inconsistent with the action of the play so far and inconsistent with Greek thought at the time. If Creon suspects one of the 'malcontents' to be Ismene surely he would also suspect Haemon as well if he knew they were engaged. He hasn't even alluded to it so far. Secondly the house of Labdacus has been cursed by the gods and it is inconceivable that Creon would allow such a marriage into his own house and have the curse descend upon his lineage. Thirdly this isn't the first time that his immediate family has been adversely effected by the house of Oedipus. Haemon isn't his only son, the other son Moenoeceus committed suicide to fulfil the prophecy of Tiresias that victory would go to Thebes with his death - a war brought on to Thebes by the sons of Oedipus. The news of the marriage is a complete and shocking surprise. The sense of family betrayal by Creon would have been great. Fathers were the ultimate law givers in their families. Though Haemon hasn't broken any law as such he has broken with tradition and his responsibility to the family. Of this Creon is only too painfully aware.

By having this secret exposed Sophocles creates a whole new undercurrent and set of complexities to his characters and plot. The secret exposed increases the dramatic tension and the underlying theme of loyalty. Rather than face the betrayal by one of his own and deal with it, Creon treats it as trivial to save face in front of his protagonist

Creon: Oh, there are other fields for him to plough

Ismene throws it right back at him

Ismene: No truer troth was ever made than theirs.

telling him that this love is so great that his own son was willing to go behind his back for it, therefore what else would he be capable of? Creon is fully aware of that possibility and to cope with it he resorts to power

Creon: No son of mine shall wed so vile a creature

and once he does it consumes him

Creon: You and your paramour, I hate you both.

If we look at the Oxford dictionary for the meaning of 'paramour' we find, "Illicit partner of married man or woman" and from the Funk and Wagnall the definition is, "A lover, especially one who unlawfully takes the place of a husband or wife". So in Creon's view Haemon has done something 'illegal', he has betrayed his father's trust. Creon's reaction is understandable, love

can easily turn to hate when one feels betrayed by one you love. To remove all future threats he immediately condemns both Ismene and Antigone. He is also clearly expressing to the Chorus that “nearest and dearest” will not escape punishment for breaking the law.

It is now the Chorus that reminds us of the curse on the house of Labdacus

Chorus: The curse departs not but falls upon the blood...generation to generation with no atonement

and it is they who also allude to the potential of Antigone to raise above it all; a potential that they recognise but she has thrown away

Chorus: ...the tree's last root, crushed out by pride of heart and the sin of a presumptuous tongue

It is interesting to think about what Sophocles was saying here, which goes against the general view of the times. If the house of Labdacus is cursed then there's no escape, for all is ordained; but Sophocles is saying that the curse continues not because the gods will it to but because of human action. In Sophocles' religious view a curse may hang on the guilty, but not the innocent. If the curse is perpetuated across a generation then it is human actions that make it so. He is also giving the clue as to how Antigone could have saved herself. If she could let go of her pride or at least recognise it she could have broken the curse and reached her potential. In displaying the heroic ideal in Antigone Sophocles reminds us that there are pitfalls.

Haemon

With the entrance of Haemon we now see Creon's true self. He does love his son. Creon is painfully aware that he actually wears two crowns, one for the state and one for the family. It is up to Haemon now to swear allegiance to both. Creon give him the opportunity.

Creon:...Son you have heard, I think, our final judgement on your late betrothed. No hard feelings I hope?

Putting it rather simply Creon is saying, I know what you did but I forgive you, can you forgive me? He reaches out still further, admitting that he knows how he must be hurting Haemon but hoping that family relationships will see them through this difficult time

Creon: Still friends, in spite of everything my son?

and the use of the word 'friends' and 'son' in the one line is significant. Creon is willing to forgive all of Haemon's indiscretions if he will have a relationship based on love and obedience.

Haemon would have been unaware of the secret being out so this meeting isn't going the way Haemon expected. If his father knows he has condemned his future bride to death why isn't he castigating him? Haemon realises that Creon is seeking approval for his actions. Previously Creon sought no approval from anyone. Now that the decree's punishment has found it's way into his own home Creon realises the full ramifications of his 'law', and with that a seed of doubt has been planted in his wisdom. Haemon throws a subtle challenge to Creon

Haemon: I am your son sir...

he doesn't use the word friend or anything even alluding to it

Haemon: ...by your wise decisions my life is ruled, and them I shall always obey

and if he wants a sycophantic son then that's what he'll get. It is worth noting that Haemon shall always obey Creon's 'wise decisions' not all of them, and certainly not the one regarding Antigone, and therefore not the proclamation regarding the burial.

Haemon: I cannot value any marriage-tie above your own good guidance.

Instead of having a family scene we now have a version of two diplomats sounding each other out before they declare war. It is Creon who has misheard the diplomatic speak and taken it as heartfelt. He's done so because it is what he wants to believe. He doesn't want to listen to Haemon, he wants Haemon to listen to him.

Creon's speech begins with family loyalty, a speech that could have been said anywhere at anytime. What it does do is confirm to Creon in his own mind that his son can act as one's son should. However that isn't the crux of the matter and Creon realises that so he changes tack. He is no longer the Ruler to a subject but a father to a son; a father who is willing to advise his son on the ways of the world, or more specifically - women.

Creon: Do not be fooled, my son, by lust and wiles of a woman. You'll have bought cold comfort if your wife's a worthless one.

If Creon is unsure of Haemon getting the message his next line makes it all to clear (the line also has a double meaning as it implied to Haemon's relationship with Antigone)

Creon: No wound strikes deeper than love that is turned to hate.

It is here that the relationship for Creon is at a cross road. Should Haemon reject him now there is no turning back. Creon the ruler will over-ride Creon the father. He can see the relationship on the brink and needs to justify his actions to his son. As a father he can't do it, but he can demonstrate how the responsibility of the King supersedes.

Creon: The girl's an enemy...the one and only traitor in our state - I cannot make myself a traitor too...if I tolerate a traitor at home, how shall I rule those abroad?

We could look at those fragments in this way - the girl's an enemy...I want to believe that you're not...I cannot save her even if I wanted to...if she and you are traitors I have no other option but to punish you both. Here we have a straightforward political text and a subtext where we can feel the torment within Creon.

What Creon does next is look for agreement with his son on the issue of law, and how he must uphold it, not change it to suit personal circumstances

Creon: To transgress or twist the law to one's own pleasure, presume to order when one should obey, is sinful, and I will have none of it.

Neither should Haemon if he is listening at all.

The second part of this speech is an insight for modern audiences into the classical Greek male mentality. It is also for it's original audience over 2000 years ago the perfect justification for Creon's inflexibility. It starts with

Creon: He whom the state appoints must be obeyed to the smallest matter, be it right or wrong.

Though the classical Greeks would have been appalled at this line as it denotes tyranny they could also understand it due to their military structure. The state appoints a "Strategos" or the Supreme Commander of the Army and Navy.

Creon: He that rules his household, without a doubt, will make the wisest King, or, for that matter, the staunchest subject.

Here the metaphor is for traditional and clan law where the ascendant male is for all intents and purposes the supreme authority, and paradoxically dependant on the clan.

Creon: He will be the man you can depend on in the storm of war, the faithfulest comrade in the day of battle....

What Sophocles is doing is invoking the imagery and iron discipline of the Phalanx to every adult male in the audience. As a fighting force the phalanx was practically invincible in its day. Its strength lay not just in the courage of the members, but in the complete obedience to the demands of the phalanx. That obedience demanded that you stood your ground next to your

compatriot covering his body with your shield, as your other compatriot did yours with his, and so on down the line. In theory there was only one weak point in a phalanx, the outermost left edge. In practice what would happen is that someone would 'break' to protect themselves instead of trusting their neighbour to do so. If the enemy could make a breach into that then

Creon: Armies are defeated, victory is turned to route. While simple obedience saves the lives of hundreds of honest folk.

So if a phalanx is to be strong and everyone survive it demands obedience and trust in the commanders. If the state is to be strong and survive it must demand the same. The speech would have had great appeal among the audience, for both the democrats and autocrats. The democrats would have understood it in the need for obedience to a Strategos, and the autocrats would have understood it for it harkened back to the good old days. It needs to be remembered that not all the Athenians were democratically minded. Many would have gladly done away with democracy to restore themselves to previous positions of privilege.

Haemon realises that any appeal to the King would be pointless. If he is to save Antigone he must appeal to the man and the father. He does so straight away

Haemon: Father, man's wisdom is the gift of heaven...

which is markedly different from his first response to Creon only a few moments ago

Haemon: I am your son, sir...

and moves into describing to Creon how he has removed himself from this people and the inherent danger in this.

Haemon: Though all men might not think as you do. Nevertheless, I have to be your watchdog, to know what others say and what they do...to praise and what to blame. Your frown is a sufficient silencer of any word that is not for your ears.

It is now that he raises the spectre of Creon's tyranny. If Creon sees himself as fair and pragmatic its Haemon that breaks that illusion

Haemon: ...this poor girl, doomed to the cruellest death, and most unjust...for an honourable action...has she not rather earned a crown of gold?...

by bringing in the concept of justice as opposed to law. The only time justice has been mentioned previously is by Antigone when she's speaking about Creon's order in allegory to the justice of the gods below. Now Haemon brings it up in very human terms and perceptions. If it were a different time and a different place, Creon himself would agree that Antigone's actions were honourable. Creon must also be thinking about how he honoured one half of the cause of a civil war. He forbade the burial for political expediency and as fortune would have it for tradition and custom as well. It might have been either brother left to rot. However as a King he must banish these thoughts. The law has been broken.

Haemon too realises that this course is of no avail. To speak to the King is useless he must talk to his father

Haemon: Father, there is nothing I prize above your happiness and well being

hoping that the feeling would be reciprocal. He realises that his father is putting himself into a hopeless dilemma if he continues down this course

Haemon: Think if there cannot be some other way...to think your own the only wisdom, and yours the only word, the only will, betrays a shallow spirit, an empty heart.

This is Haemon's way of telling his father he has become a changed man. He is no longer the father he recognises. By being inflexible Creon is destroying his own humanity. To be human is to be fallible and Haemon brings this message home

Haemon: It is no weakness for the wisest man to know when he is wrong...good as it is to have infallible wisdom, since this is rarely found, the next best thing is to listen to wise advice.

Haemon has tried to appeal to the King, his father, and the man. He knows that he has put his relationship with his father on the line, and possibly his life on the line with the King. He is faced with losing two he loves unless there can be a resolution. He will lose Antigone if she dies, and he will lose his father Creon to the King.

The Chorus itself during this time is like a spectator. It takes no position.

Chorus: ...there is much to be said for both sides

If they would have chosen one over the other then either would have collapsed completely. That they don't is what spurs Creon on. If they refuse to take a side now they must be pushed.

Creon: Indeed! Am I take lessons...from a fellow of his age?

The exchanges that follow between Creon and Haemon are full of passion, and heated. Creon restates his authority and his right to rule, irrespective of popular opinion. Haemon arguing that he cannot rule without the will and support of the people. Here are two diametrically opposed views colliding with each other. Even if Creon inwardly agrees with Haemon, he cannot let go of his sense of being betrayed. He views Haemon's case as one of self interest, blind to the fact that Haemon loves both he and Antigone.

Creon: Yet you plead her cause...you'll never marry her this side of death

If Haemon can't be loyal to his father he will be loyal to the King, and the King's anger knows no bounds

Creon: Don't toady me, boy; keep that for your lady love...I'll make you sorry for your impudence. Bring out the she devil, and let her die now, with her bridegroom by to see it done!

With the stormy departure of Haemon

Haemon: That sight I'll never see. Nor from this hour will you ever see me again.

we see that with Creon, to paraphrase from Euripides' Medea, anger masters his resolve. His sense of betrayal is great for both his roles of father and King have been repudiated. His son is now lost to him and rather than grieve his sense of moral indignation pushes him to attack rather than deal with the issue.

Creon: Let him go...let him rage as never man raged. He shall not save those women from their doom.

Though a King, Creon is still a man and father and shouldn't be a martinet to his own expediency. It is the Chorus that tests for what they expect could be the last time his humanity

Chorus: You mean...to put them both to death?

And it is here that we begin to see the first cracks in his resolve. With his sense of loss he begins to question the sense of his justice. For the first time Creon recognises that with the power of law in his hands, he could unwittingly, or in rashness and haste, abuse it. Instead of turning on the Chorus for questioning him, he listens, and realises that he isn't, "...a King, responsible only to myself". If he is to be a King he must rule justly, and with justice the people will follow him.

Creon: No, not the one whose hand was innocent.

As to Antigone, she is guilty and must die. Now another crack appears. Where previously he was willing to put her to death in front of Haemon, he now reconsiders. With his reflection Creon can now see that perhaps his law and the law of the gods may not be compatible. Perhaps her death isn't justice, it is only legally inevitable. He also realises that there are higher laws to which he must ultimately be responsible.

Blood guilt

Now Creon obliquely admits of his transgression of divine law

Creon: I'll have her taken to a desert place...and there walled up...alive...with enough food to acquit ourselves of the blood-guiltiness.

By walling her up with food he isn't technically killing Antigone, her fate is in the hands of the gods. It is they who will determine whether she dies or not. To kill someone from your family was as abhorrent then as it is today. It was also considered abhorrent to the gods and anyone guilty of such an act would bring down a curse not just on themselves but also on their family. This curse could carry across generations which Creon knows only too well. It was Laius who defied the gods by having a son, Oedipus, and then had him exposed on a mountain to acquit himself of any blood guilt. The practice wasn't an everyday occurrence in Athenian society, but it did happen. The Spartans were much more adept at it by culling the weak and sick babies very soon after birth. The child's fate was in the lap of the gods, as well as in the jaws of any passing animal, or the heat of the sun, cold of the night, or some passerby the might adopt and save the baby. By walling Antigone Creon is ensuring that no passerby will save her, but he isn't preventing any intervention by the gods.

The infant (and future King) Cyrus was handed over to a shepherd with instructions that it was to be left prey for the wild beasts of the hills, and the shepherd substituted him for his own still born child. This can be found in Herodotus' Histories Book 1(3). So Sophocles ties in the Aristotelian dictum that what has happened before is manifestly. Now as the family of Cyrus aren't directly responsible for the death of the child (the wild beasts are) they do not have the blood guilt that would bring about a family curse. The analogy is that Creon in commanding that Antigone be entombed is not directly killing her. Like the parents of Cyrus he is looking at the loophole in the law to escape divine retribution. The Gods themselves weren't entirely moral beings, so the concept of a moral responsibility wasn't entirely necessary in dealing with them. As can be seen in Antigone however the concept of moral responsibility was important to Sophocles.

The Chorus

It is also of interest to note that historically a public enemy was stoned to death. Perhaps this was Creon's original idea, but now Haemon has stated that regarding whether the deed was dishonourable, "The people of Thebes think not." So if the people of Thebes aren't considering Antigone's deed 'traitorous' they would hardly participate in such a community event as a stoning and Creon would be foolhardy to require it of them.

The Creon that we see now is markedly different from the one at the beginning of the play who could so confidently know the will of the gods in regards to burial. By assuming supreme authority he perhaps has assumed too much. What Creon has realised is the cost. It has cost him to make decisions he regrets, and brought forward a side of his nature he always thought he had under control. It is the Chorus that perhaps expresses the dilemma of Creon best

Chorus: Where is the equal of love...

The Chorus is actually speaking about the love between Antigone and Creon, but it is also reflected on the love between father and son

Chorus: Where is the battle he cannot win, the power he cannot outmatch?

Which is a line that applies equally to Haemon and Antigone as to Creon and Haemon

Chorus: Marring the righteous man, driving his soul into mazes of sin and strife, dividing a house..

for that is exactly what has happened to Creon. It is his sense of the betrayal of his love by Haemon that has marred him and therefore divided his house.

The Chorus and Antigone

Now Antigone enters on her way to her fate. For her final journey she has an audience, the Chorus. It is now faced with death that we see a change in her. She doesn't use this opportunity to voice her views on unjust laws. She has done all she can. If the law is to be changed then it is up to the people to change it. What Antigone does is personalise her predicament. People may or may not be able to identify with a law but they can identify with another person. Antigone hopes for their empathy, and for their sympathy.

Which in a way she does receive but not in the way she expected.

Chorus: But glory and praise go with you lady...you go unmarred by the hand of consuming sickness...living free...as none other that ever died before you.

The Chorus does recognise the nobility of her action, and with her death, there can be no taint afterwards. She will always be remembered as she is now. Antigone's speech about the 'Daughter of Tantalus' tries once more to persuade the Chorus that they must act if things are to change so that no more people will end up with a similar fate. The Chorus however doesn't act as she wants. Rather they once more state that she will be remembered for her actions, but don't indicate that her actions or death will change anything.

This inaction by the Chorus is beyond Antigone's comprehension. She sees herself being made ridiculous by them. She doesn't see herself as sharing 'god born maiden' fate. She sees herself as unjustly put to death with the acquiescence of the Chorus. What she has done previously with Creon she now does to the Chorus. She turns on them

Antigone: Mockery! By the gods of my father, must you make a laughing stock of me while I yet live?

and rejects them

Antigone: No friend to weep at my banishment...alone to linger lost between life, and death for ever

The Chorus now tell her the reason that they cannot support her

Chorus: ...you have gone your own way to the outermost limit of daring

which is telling her that her fate is due to her own actions, she didn't look for their support previously. They're telling her that if she presumed support she was wrong to presume such.

Chorus: This is the expiation you must make for the sin of your father.

The sin they're referring to isn't that of Oedipus marrying his mother, but that of pride. It is this sin that Antigone doesn't recognise in herself.

Antigone: ...Monstrous marriage of mother and son...doomed to this death by the ill starred marriage that marred my brother's life.

And it is the Chorus that tell her why they can't support her, for she can't see her own faults

Chorus: You are the victim of your own self will

It is now that Antigone realises what she has actually done. Her pride and with it her presumption have doomed her.

Antigone: And must go the way that lies before me. No funeral hymn...no friend to weep at my departing.

Creon re-enters seeing the Chorus with Antigone. Once again all he can see are 'malcontents' attempting to garner support against the law and his fury is again released.

Creon: Away with her at once...leave her and let her die...if die she must

But it is no longer a fury against Antigone personally, it is against her as a concept. He must deal with her as an object, an object to be removed. As a person Creon has come to doubt himself, and his decisions are questionable. In the role of King (a concept) he can act with surety.

Creon: ...her blood will not be on our hands

This line can be read to mean that it will not be on his hands, but on the hands of a King who was forced to act for the good of the state. He is now forced to divide himself into separate entities - Creon the man, fallible and human; and Creon the King. Initially he saw no differentiation between the two. Now to survive emotionally he is forced to mental gymnastics.

If the Chorus is to act to save Antigone then it must do so now. One word would be all it takes from them. A simple 'no' but it doesn't come.

With her last chance gone Antigone finds solace in what's left to her

Antigone: So to my grave, my bridal bower... I go...to join many of kinsmen...last and unhappiest before my time.

It is worth noting that there is no mention of Ismene who will actually be the last. It is as if like in the beginning Ismene no longer counts because she didn't join her. Antigone can only see herself when confronted with Creon.

Antigone: It was by this service to your dear dead body Polynices, I earned the punishment...though all good people know it was for your honour.

It is true enough that this act has 'earned the punishment', and if we only follow the action line of the play it is reason enough. However Sophocles wouldn't have just had the action line in mind when writing the play. What he was interested in was the psychology of people. The gods don't intervene in his plays as they do with Euripides, so Antigone's reason for committing the crime had to come from within her. In her first meeting with Creon after her arrest she could have admitted the deed and pleaded extenuating circumstances. Instead she hit Creon with, "I did not think your edict strong enough?" and turned it into a battle of wills and power. All crimes need both opportunity and motive. Antigone made the opportunity, and she has in fact two motives. The obvious which she publicly proclaims, and an inner motivation - that the law (as represented by Creon) is an affront to her pride.

When she is in front of Creon she is unrelenting. When the Guard is leading her away however her tone changes. With the confrontation over we hear little of her religious faith, and her defences fall, until in a moving and tragic speech she abandons everything except the fact that she had to do it. She is facing death, deserted by the Chorus, she has no confidence even in the Gods. She even doubts her own impulse....

Antigone: ...O but I would not have done the forbidden thing for any husband or for any son. For why? I could have had another husband and by him other sons, if one were lost; but, father and mother lost, where would I get another brother?

This is the final tragedy of Antigone and it is with this particular speech Sophocles shows how he can weave history into his art.

The question that needs asking is why does the hero, in this case Antigone, doubt her actions? Sophocles wants to show us that Antigone is human. If she were to go and meet her death with the grim determination she had when facing Creon, how could the audience hope to identify with her? If we are to identify with our heroes, then they need to be something like us.

We need to recognise their humanity as we recognise our own. Sophocles knew this and showed Antigone's humanity as she approaches her death. We can identify with her now. We too know something of the fear and doubt she must feel. She is like us. By being like us Antigone's action are all the more heroic, and paradoxically within our reach. Through her we too are able of heroic action, of higher morals, of higher justice, and be able to see the potential of our own divinity. If she was not like us, what model would she be for whom? She would remain an abstraction for us, her audience.

Aristotle said the following about tragedy, "...tragedians still keep to real names, the reason being that what is possible is credible: what has not happened we do not at once feel sure to be possible: but what has happened is manifestly possible: otherwise it would not have happened." Sophocles proves to us that Antigone is truly possible with the use of the brother speech. In Histories, Herodotus tells the story of the Persian Intaphemes, who is going to be put to death with all the males in his family by the King Darius. Intaphemes's wife is crying and wailing so heartbreakingly that Darius allows her to choose one of the men to be spared. Intaphemes wife chooses her brother. Darius is amazed at her choice and asks her why her brother over her husband or boys. She answers, " O king, if the gods will, I may have another husband other children when these are gone. But as my father and mother are no more, it is impossible that I should have another brother. This was my thought when I asked to have my brother spared."

By weaving this example from the Histories, Antigone's speech is even more poignant. The Histories were well known to the Athenians, and Sophocles was directly challenging their views on the male designated role of women in society. If within a democratic society people were free to pursue their ideals, a democratic society should not suppress it's women. By using the example Sophocles also stirred the debate on racism and xenophobia within Athenian and Greek society. The Greek world view was clearly divided between the Hellenes (Greeks) and the Barbarians (everyone not a Greek). With this speech based on historical fact about a Barbarian woman the clear message was that, the heroic ideal was not the exclusive property of the Greeks.

According to the translator E.F. Watling the lines about, "I would not have done the forbidden thing..." are according to some editors a 'spurious interpolation' and are rejected for being "logically and psychologically inappropriate." They suppose that Antigone 'in despair' gives 'utterances to inconsistent and unworthy thoughts'. My opinion on this is certain 'Editors' should read more Herodotus and a bit of Aristotle's "Poetics".

The Chorus again alludes obliquely to her sin of pride to Creon.

Chorus: Still the same tempest in the heart torments her soul with angry gusts.

But Creon isn't hearing any subtleties, he is set on a course of action and will see it through

Creon: The more cause then have they that guard her to hasten their work; or they too suffer

for he still can only see Antigone as a germ spreading insurrection within his state. And as he sees Antigone that is how she sees him. For both of them the issue isn't law anymore it is personal

Antigone: Time stays no longer, last daughter of your royal house go I, his prisoner, because I honoured those things to which honour truly belongs.

Ismene is once again forgotten in this clash of titanic wills. If Antigone had any realisation of her sin of pride it is dispelled when confronted by Creon. With realisation beyond her the Chorus try to console her with the child of Danae speech. In each stanza there are allegories to her fate. Like and outsider seeing two friends tear each other apart they cannot take sides when they know that each is wrong. All they can do is hint or suggest and hope that one or the other

realises. If Antigone comes to realise her fault, it may not necessarily save her life but could save her soul from torment.

Tieresias

Enter Tieresias, perhaps the most enigmatic character ever to grace a stage. There has been a great amount of material written about who Tieresias is, and even though that's interesting in itself he (some say he was half man and half woman, others a spirit, others a demigod), knowing it all doesn't add a great deal to understanding the role plays. What we need to know is that he has a special relationship with the gods, he has visions, and most importantly he has no vested interest in the politics or the power play of the city. Tieresias for all intents and purposes is neutral.

Sophocles believed in man, and he also believed in the Gods. His view of the Gods was quite different to Euripides, and his representation of this is Tieresias. With his entrance a new set of agents appear. These agents are the gods whose presence is felt through Tieresias. He has little character outside of this and the message that he brings to Creon is that the gods are angry and he must reverse his decision. It is worthy to note that the Gods are informing Creon that they would like him to change his mind. They are not forcing him to do it, that decision is his and his alone. The gods are not asserting themselves.

Sophocles uses the gods as symbols. He lets them speak only after the action is complete and he carefully divorces them from any suspicion of interference. They are a witness, like the audience, to the heroic action. The choice, be it moral, legal, ethical, or philosophical is in the domain of people. Sophocles doesn't allow the gods to enter or interfere, but he does remind us that there is 'something' there. This is a great contrast to Euripides. What the gods do that the audience cannot is give the action a cosmic setting.

Tieresias' first words have a portent of what is to come though they are disguised in a self mockery

Tieresias: Gentlemen of Thebes, we greet you...for the blind man goes where ever his leader tells him

and it is no accident that Sophocles put in this double meaning as bluntly as he could. In the Braun translation the line is " Nobles of Thebes... The blind must walk where others lead". Though Sophocles doesn't have the gods intervening in human affairs, he doesn't want people to abstain from their social or moral obligations on that rationale. The 'heroic idea' must be brought forward and action must be taken. As we have seen the Chorus does recognise the fault of Antigone, but by their inaction they're acquiescing with Creon. By being as blunt as possible Sophocles is telling his audience that attempting to justify their inaction on important issues to will not be tolerated.

The double meaning of the line is lost on Creon. As Tieresias has had no political role in the past, he cannot imagine him having any in the future so takes the line on face value

Creon: You are welcome, father Tieresias. What's your news?

Though Creon uses the term father he certainly doesn't mean it in the literal sense. Its an honorific he gladly bestows, but not for long. Within the space of a few lines we move into the crux of the matter in both an individual and moral sense. If we run a few lines together we see an interesting progression of the scene, and a clear view of Sophocles' philosophy

Tieresias: ...advice if you will heed it...have steered a steady course...you stand on a razor's edge

From these few lines we now know that previously Creon heeded advice, and by doing so was able to take appropriate actions. He is also being told that the situation he finds himself in isn't irreversible.

Creon: ...never failed to heed it...gladly acknowledge the debt we owe to you...grave words...good priest...Say on.

Creon freely admits that previous counsel by Tiresias has been wise and beneficial, and that he has acted upon it. Now however he is blinded by his own self assurance and can't fathom why Tiresias would have come to him.

As stated previously the gods of Sophocles will not interfere with the choices you have to make. Through Tiresias we have the representation of higher or moral laws. He is the reminder that they exist, and once reminded of them we are all on the razor's edge for we cannot claim ignorance of them.

The beginning of his speech is full of imagery about the bad omens that he has experienced. Considering that Creon has "heeded" Tiresias in the past this preamble is the meat of the matter and would no doubt have some affect on him. Now Tiresias delivers to Creon the unexpected

Tiresias: The blight upon us is your doing.

and he continues

Tiresias: The blood that stains our alters and our shrines...that dogs and vultures have licked up..is none other than the blood of Oedipus, spilled from the veins of his ill fated sons...and our prayers the gods abominate.

It is worth comparing the Braun translation to the above

Tiresias: The state is sick. You and your principles are to blame. Every alter and hearth has been loaded with fodder brought by birds and dogs off him, the fallen son of Oedipus. Therefore the gods reject our prayers and our sacrifices.....

Both go to the heart of the matter but the Braun translation is more easily accessible. The gods are rejecting 'our' prayers because all are guilty. The people, represented by the Chorus have failed to act (burying Polynices) when piety demanded it. The imagery of "every alter and hearth has been loaded with fodder brought by birds and dogs" is that the 'pollution' has been brought to them and they cannot escape it. By inaction, or acquiescing to Creon, the people are equally guilty. The matter however isn't irreversible

Tiresias: ...all men fall into sin. But falling into sin, he is not forever lost hapless and helpless, who can make amends and has not set his face against repentance...Pay the dead his due. Only a fool is governed by self will.

Tiresias is telling Creon that though he's a King he is only a man, with all the faults and frailty that mortals have. What Sophocles is hinting at with Tiresias is that the voice of intelligent people is as good as an oracle, and what the intelligent say early the gods only later confirm. The speech finishes with Tiresias stating he has no vested interest except the interest of all. Creon's reaction is both predictable and sad.

Creon sees yet another betrayal, and the first indication of this is his use of 'reverend sir' instead of 'father Tiresias', distancing himself from the relationship. All the good guidance that Tiresias has given previously is now only a form of trickery

Creon: ..how you make me your commodity to trade and traffic in for your own advancement.

It is now that Creon states quite clearly that only he understands the gods' will

Creon: Let the eagles carry his carcass up to the throne of Zeus; even that would not be sacrilege enough to frighten me from my determination not to allow this burial. No man's act

has the power to pollute the goodness of God. But great and terrible is the fall Tiresias of mortal men who seek their own advantage by uttering evil in the guise of good.

Creon cannot see that what he accuses Tiresias of is actually true of himself. What Creon lacks is recognition. Recognition according to Aristotle goes like this, "Recognition, as the name indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge." For Creon the knowledge that he is only human comes too late, and that is his tragedy.

It is this perhaps that Tiresias recognises (if we run a few lines together)

Tiresias: ...is there any wisdom in the world?...What prize outweighs the priceless worth of prudence?... And there you speak of your own symptom, sir.

The relationship between them is now in tatters and all familiarities are gone. They now refer to themselves as 'sir' and 'priest'. The argument between them is hot and furious for Creon sees himself surrounded by enemies

Creon: I say all prophets seek their own advantage.

Tiresias: All Kings, I say, seek gain unrighteously

Creon: Do you forget to whom you say it?

and the final blow to Creon's pride is a truth he must deny

Tiresias:...our King and benefactor, by my guidance.

which is a far cry from the beginning for Creon, "For my part, I have always held the view, and hold it still, that a King whose lips are sealed by fear, unwilling to seek advice, is damned." Creon cannot seek advice because he has fear of what he may recognise in himself. The fear that he is wrong. It is this that promotes his attack and forces Tiresias to divulge all.

Now the prophecy of Tiresias is a statement of fact. Creon is no longer on the razor's edge for that time has past. First is that his son will die for the 'two debts' he has to pay

Tiresias: ...one for the life you sent to death...one for the dead still lying above ground, unburied, ...unblessed by the gods below.

If there ever was a clear statement on how Sophocles viewed the roles of gods and man it comes now

Tiresias: You cannot alter this. The gods themselves cannot undo it. It follows of necessity from what you have done.

So the power of the gods is limited as is the power of man. It isn't the gods that restrict man, it is man himself. Once an action is taken it may not be able to be taken back. For every moment in our lives we too stand on the razor's edge with the actions we are to undertake. If once the action is taken it cannot be reversed we too must act with prudence and seek advice before committing ourselves. For Creon this time has past.

Tiresias goes on

Tiresias: The time shall come...and soon...when your house will be filled with the lamentations of men and women; and every neighbouring city will be goaded to fury against you...

For as the gods have refused to hear the people of Thebe's prayers due to their inaction against an unpius act so too will the other cities be affected if they allow Creon to rule Thebes. The King in ancient times was not only the Supreme ruler of the people but also the Supreme religious leader. The King was head of both state and church. Even the Roman Emperors after the fall of the Republic had the title of Pontifex Maximus (head of the state religion) though none would dare call themselves King. Henry the VIII also assumed the same powers after breaking away from the Catholic Church which he saw as limiting his absolute right to rule. Henry was well aware of the historical precedents as were all later Kings who claimed divine lineage.

Though the ancient Greeks were constantly fighting against each other they were able to combine against common enemies because the one thing they did have in common was religion. Now Creon is breaking away from that, and all the traditions and customs that follow from that. He has become a greater threat than any foreign invader. He would be seen as a cancerous growth that if left unchecked would destroy everything. This is something that they couldn't allow, and therefore must destroy.

It should be noted that throughout this scene Tiresias makes no mention of Antigone's pious act or how it is viewed. In his first speech the focus is on the body of Eteocles, "Pay the dead his due. Wound not the fallen. It is no glory to kill and kill again." In the second speech he speaks about "the life you sent to death, the life you abominably entombed..." What is important to him is that ritual has been broken. Piety in ancient times equated to ritual. Even if he personally agrees with Antigone's actions it is not up to him to say so. Tiresias sees himself as a guide, not a supporter of one or the other. Not taking sides and reaffirming the importance of ritual would have been no surprise to the audience. Not to offer sacrifices would cause the ire of the gods, the reason for the sacrifice was secondary. You could in fact get away with murder as long as you practiced rituals and offered sacrifices. Euripide's "Medea" is a perfect example of this, for after murdering her children she states to Jason

Medea: ...I will ordain an annual feast and sacrifice to be solemnised for ever by the people of Corinth, to expiate this impious murder...

Euripide's view of the roles of the Gods was quite different to that of Sophocles but they would have been in agreement about the loss of divinity once the gods became anthropomorphised. Both question in their own way the traditional beliefs of ritual. Euripides by clearly stating reprieve for an 'impious murder', Sophocles by purposely having a pious act punished for it.

It is with the exit of Tiresias that we see the doubt and fear grow in Creon. He now sees that everything he held dear and wished to preserve will be destroyed. His family and his city will perish if he doesn't relent. Where there was absolute surety there only remains doubt

Creon: ..my heart is torn in two. It is hard to give way, and hard to stand and abide the coming of the curse...

and it is the Chorus that now see Creon recognising his own humanity and fears and are unafraid to advise him. It could be argued that they have no choice but to advise him as his doom is also theirs. The other Kings could hardly allow them to go unpunished for complying with Creon's edict when they knew better.

Chorus: Release the woman from her rocky prison. Set up a tomb for him that lies unburied.

The Chorus itself could also be said to be looking for a scapegoat towards their possible oncoming calamity. In regards to who should be doing something about it they say

Chorus: Go. Let your own hand do it, and no other.

implying that it was Creon's action that caused all this. Now this may be technically true but there is more to it than that. As Tiresias said, "Our fires, our sacrifices, the gods abominate" spelling out that what was an individual guilt is now a collective one - due to their inaction. That they now call upon Creon alone to do penance or make amends is denying their complicity. Creon may realise his 'guilt' but he also realises now that he can only rule with the will of the people. As the people will be punished he knows that they will find a scapegoat, and that scapegoat will be him.

The ancient Greeks themselves knew full well that they made Kings, and brought Kings down. It was common practice to appoint Kings, and sometimes more than one simultaneously. Admittedly many of these Kings were chosen by the aristocracy from the aristocracy but the fact

remained if the King couldn't rule the people they weren't Kings for long. Even the Emperors of Rome knew they couldn't rule without the will of the 'mob' of Rome. Charles the first of England learned the hard way (by being beheaded after losing a civil war) that the 'divine right' of Kings didn't mean much to an angry populous.

It is now that we have "Recognition" as Aristotle would have put it.

Creon: ..t'was I imprisoned her, and I will set her free. Now I believe it is by the laws of heaven that man must live.

The tragedy of Creon is his own. The Gods did not interfere. They had their place as symbols or as ideals. Sophocles reminds his audience and us that we are responsible for our own actions.

The following Chorus 'song' is indicative of their turnaround, or awakening. The city and themselves are in peril and they turn to the gods, and particularly Dionysus to come and save them. They are appealing to him to heal the city where Zeus begot him. This appeal is based on filial loyalty. If the Chorus see little family loyalty in Thebes (for the outstanding instance of it is being punished) they may have to seek it in heaven. The Chorus is also praying that in some way the city will not only be saved, but that the gods will also disperse glory to Antigone, and through her onto them.

The Messenger

Now we have the Messenger. In ancient Greek times a messenger held a privileged and special position, not only in Greece but throughout the known world. Messengers could go where they wanted, except during times of war, as they had the equivalent of our modern day diplomatic immunity. They were the sole secure way of carrying a message and ensuring it reached it's destination. According to Greek thought at the time all messengers were male and direct descendants of Talhybius who was the messenger of Menalaus, the Commander of the Greek forces during the siege and capture of Troy.

When the Persian King Darius was about to invade Greece he sent messengers to Athens and Sparta requesting that the cities pay "Earth and Water" to him. To offer or pay such was to surrender. The Athenians listened and sent the messengers away empty handed, the Spartans killed them. After doing this the Spartans felt themselves cursed. Three Spartans volunteered to go to Darius and offer their lives in exchange for the murdered messengers. Though gravely insulted by Sparta, Darius received them and let them live, sending back a message which to our modern sayings would equate to 'two wrongs do not make a right'.

The rules of Greek tragedy did not allow the showing of bloodshed or the act of murder on stage. Dead bodies may be seen after the act, but the act itself mustn't be shown. One of the roles of the Messenger was to relay, or describe the event that couldn't be shown. Whether it was a single murder, as that of Astyanax in Euripides' "The Women of Troy" or the destruction of a whole army as in Aeschylus' "The Persians" the language is evocative, powerful, and highly descriptive. The Messenger paints the scene in detail with words. The Messenger here also poses some theological questions right at the start

Messenger: What is the life of man? A thing not fixed for good or evil, fashioned for praise or blame.

which would have been a shock to all the fatalists in the audience but in keeping with Sophocles view that people create their own destinies through their actions (or inaction). The following line is of particular interest as in one instance it seems to go against Sophocles own philosophy

Messenger: Chance raises a man to the heights, chance casts him down....

and more into that of Euripides, for he couldn't deny the element that chance plays in people's lives.

The plays of Euripides reflect the growth in Athens of a feeling that, as Jocasta, in Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus puts it, "...the operation of chance governs all things". Even in the pre war 'Alcestis' Euripides prophesied the desperate mood of the war years through Herakles, "The course of Chance - no one can see where it will go - this is not a thing that can be taught, or captured by technique...Enjoy yourself, drink, calculate that this day is yours - the rest belongs to Chance." Menalaus, in the Euripidean 'Orestes' states along similar terms, "Now it is necessary that the wise should be slaves to Chance." Chance became a dominant factor in human life and was to be personified in the Goddess Tyche (Chance is feminine in Greek). This is not unprecedented. In fact what was unprecedented is that it became a philosophical abstraction. Even in Herodotus is often personified and usually with divine dispensation. From Sophocles we have Oedipus calling himself the "son of Chance" and in Euripides 'Ion' Chance is addressed as a divine being, "O you who have changed the fortunes of tens of thousands of mortals before now, making them unfortunate and then prosperous, Chance..."

The very existence of this new Goddess Chance makes the existence of the old Gods meaningless. In the passage of Euripides 'Cyclops' we have Odysseus preparing to put out Polyphemus' eye appealing to Haephestus and Sleep to help him, "Do not destroy Odysseus and his crew after their glorious labours at Troy, at the hands of a man who cares nothing for Gods or mortals. Otherwise we must think that Chance is a divinity and the power of other divinities is inferior to that of Chance." The meaning of the old gods eventually diminished as the pessimistic mood of the Fifth Century due to the war deepened in the Fourth. Chance seemed to reign supreme in spite of the majority of philosophers attempts to regulate it to a minor role. Plato went against the tide by stating, "...practically all human affairs are matters of chance." In the last years of the Fourth Century Demetrius of Phalerum wrote a book on Chance, and the historian Polybus quotes a passage that identifies Chance as the governing force in human history, "Chance, which makes no contracts with this life of ours, makes everything new contrary to our calculation and displays her power in the unexpected."

The reason that Sophocles uses Chance or refers to it in his plays is that chance had no part in them. All the action and consequences of action come from individuals that made conscious choices. Chance had nothing to do with Creon's decree or his ensuing actions. They were all of his own doing. The same is true for all of Sophocles' plays. By putting the possibility of Chance into them he is rejecting Euripides ideas or notions on it and forcing the audience to do so. The audience can clearly see that Chance had nothing to do with what they have just been a witness to. There have been fundamental underlying ideas and actions that have caused this, not "Chance". Chance has no place in Sophocles' religious or philosophical views. The old gods were not meaningless to Sophocles.

The Messenger's description of Creon is in keeping with Sophocles' and the Athenian view on life. It is also reflective of some of the histories of Herodotus, and the writings of Euripides, for in Medea we have a Messenger with a very similar message. If we compare a few lines of the two works

Messenger: ...for life without life's joys is living death; and such a life is his. Riches and rank and show of majesty and state, where no joy is, are empty, vain, and unsubstantial shadows, of no weight to be compared with happiness of heart.

Medea Messenger: Happiness is a thing no man possesses. Fortune may come to one man, now to another, as prosperity increases; happiness never

The lines about prosperity and happiness, and life without life's joys, are alluding to 'Histories' by Herodotus. Herodotus wrote the following when the Lydian King Croesus, who was rich, powerful and envied by all men; asked the Athenian sage Solon. "Whom of all the men you have seen would you deem the most happy?" Solon replied, "...he who unites the greatest number of advantages, and retaining them to the day of his death, then dies peaceably, that man alone, sire, is, in my judgement entitled to bear the name of 'happy'. But in every other matter it behoves me to mark well the end: for oftentimes God gives men a gleam of happiness, and then plunges them into ruin". Croesus laughed at this as he felt secure and practically omnipotent, later when he lost his Kingdom and became a slave Solon's words came back to haunt him. Herodotus was famous fellow Athenian, and a friend of Sophocles. So what happened to Croesus (the loss of happiness) might happen to all of us. It should also be noted here that Solon wasn't some obscure fellow, but perhaps one of the most eminent Athenians to that date. He was known as Solon the Lawgiver and considered one of the seven sages. There is little that the audience wouldn't have known about him or his life.

The Messenger goes on to deliver the news of Haemon's death, what drove him to it, and how Creon is now a broken man no longer able nor willing to rule

Messenger: What's next to do, your worships will decide

We now have the entrance of Eurydice and her fate is sad indeed. She is totally unprepared for the news that will greet her. Like so many others she now has to bear the consequences of actions beyond her control or understanding. This is the only time we see her and it's not for very long. Some might argue that her appearance isn't necessary to move the play along, and they would be right. The Messenger instead of telling us about just Haemon's death could easily have told us of hers also. However without her appearance there would be a loss of dramatic and tragic impact. She the innocent, now also suffers. In her final act of suicide she too rebels against Creon using the only weapon she has - her life. It is as if the death of Antigone has made an awakening in the people around her, an awakening to rebellion. They too, like Antigone, choose death rather than living with dishonour. It is through Eurydice that we can see a link to Aristotle's ideas on the soul, "...nothing can harm a good man either in life or after death."

Eurydice leaves the stage silently as the Messenger relates events, and it is the order of events that is of some interest.

Messenger: I attended you husband, the King, to the edge of the field where lay the body of Polynices, in a pitiable state...

and then later after burning and burying the body

Messenger: That done, we turned towards the deep rock - chamber of the maid that was married with death...

To our modern minds the priority would be to save Antigone first and then bury the body, as Creon said, "I will go this instance... 'twas I imprisoned her, and I will set her free..." Yet she is secondary. If we look at the last sentence of Creon's before he sets off we have the reason why, "...Now I believe it is by the laws of heaven that man must live." The first law of heaven that Creon broke was in not giving the body proper burial, and it is this that preys most heavily on his conscience. The Athenian audience back then wouldn't have placed the martyrdom of Antigone as the central focus of the tragedy. For them the retribution upon Creon for his defiance of sacred obligations would have been the central theme. This is also echoed in Tiresias, "...and every neighbouring city will be goaded against you, for upon them too the pollution falls when the dogs and vultures bring the defilement of blood to their hearths and alters."

The closing of this speech is the lesson for us all through Creon's example

Messenger: How great calamity can come to man through man's perversity.

Creon

With the Messenger now gone Creon enters carrying the body of Haemon. As Aristotle said he now has recognition

Creon: The sin, the sin of the erring soul...O the curse of my stubborn will...Dead for my fault not yours.

And it is a little later that Sophocles puts forward his religious and philosophical ideas in a roundabout way

Creon: Upon my head God has delivered this heavy punishment

which his audience would know (if they followed the play closely) isn't true. At no point have the gods interfered or intervened so far. 'This heavy punishment' has, as Teiresias put it, 'follows of necessity from what you have done.' Creon, when being 'on the razor's edge', by his actions set forth a chain of events that once in motion couldn't be stopped. In the end he too realises this

Creon: There is no man can bear this guilt but I...my hands have done amiss

implying that the gods are also guiltless.

In closing the play Sophocles again puts forward his views, and it is the order of things said that show us his, and what he believes should be our priorities. He has the Chorus, who are representing us, telling us what we should now know, firstly

Chorus: Of happiness the crown and chiefest part is wisdom

and secondly

Chorus: ...and to hold the gods in awe. This is the law that...we learn when we are old.

In a quick summation it could be said that Antigone and the heroic ideal of her sacrifice has brought down the Tyrant. This was not the outcome she expected so her action proved far more powerful than she could have ever expected. Through her we are able to see the value of sacrifice to the higher value and moral codes - the heroic idea - that all Greeks (or us) should aspire to. The tragedy of Creon is due to the hybris of pride. Because of this, he believes himself to be benevolent, or acting in the best interest of the people. Creon is clear cut in this respect he has no hidden agendas. Like Antigone, he wears his heart upon his sleeve. This is not to imply that Creon is a simplistic character. Creon isn't two dimensional, he is rounded out with all the strengths and weaknesses required. Creon believes he is right in the circumstances facing him. He pursues what he believes with such conviction that it brings about his tragedy. With him we see a man who learns the errors of his way; only to late to stop the forces that he has put in motion. He has no future choices for choices have overtaken him.

For a final examination of Creon, let us look at him albeit somewhat simply, in the light of Aristotle's opinion that a vital element in tragedy is the journey from ignorance to knowledge, or recognition.

Creon in ignorance

conscious

Believes he is right
Has moral strength
Doesn't see his personal faults.

unconscious

Believes he is right
Has no dilemma
Doesn't realise his faults and believes he has overcome them.

spiritual

Justifies his actions according to his beliefs.
Doesn't believe he has sinned.
Acceptance of divinity

Creon in knowledge

conscious

Sees his faults
Moral questioning

unconscious

Recognises his faults and questions his ability to deal with them.
No longer believes he is right

spiritual

Questions his actions according to his beliefs.
Knows that he can sin.
Acceptance of divinity

What's wrong with Antigone "Daughter of Oedipus"

The play is on one level about politics. Political deliberation requires one to listen, persuade, and be engaged. Political success depends on compromise. The greatest obstacle to overcome in all of this is pride, or as the ancient Greeks would call it 'Hubris'. No one stated the case for acting in moderation than Aristotle and no one stated the case against hubris than Sophocles.

Sophocles was concerned with political hubris. We can see it in Oedipus Rex. When Oedipus hears the oracle's prophecy of incest and patricide he takes steps to avoid it. He relies on his strength and cunning, and becomes the King of Thebes. To end the plague he must avenge the murder of Laius and with absolute certainty he sets out to find the murderer and see justice carried out. His search for the truth reveals a history he would have never wanted to know. Hubris blinded him, and when he sees the truth he wishes he was blind again (figuratively).

According to Aristotle one of the things tragedy requires is a character that we admire, but who possesses a flaw (Harmatia) or an error in judgement. In the more profound form the hero recognises the flaw and faces it (recognition). Antigone in the first instance doesn't seem to fit into the Aristotelian formulae. In truth Aristotle didn't know what to make of 'Antigone'. All he can say in the 'Poetics' is that it's a poor plot for a tragedy. As great a man as he was Aristotle missed the point with Antigone, as he did also with Euripides' Medea. Over two thousand years later the philosopher Hegel thought 'Antigone' the supreme example of tragedy. Mind you Hegel wasn't right about everything either, so it just proves it's hard to be right all the time about everything.

If Aristotle missed the point, what is it. It is the harmatia (flaw) of Antigone and her lack of recognition. Now let us see how and why Aristotle missed. His formulae applies to Creon, and to Ismene. Both are noble and flawed. Both reach a moment of truth and change. However the play is about Antigone not about them. It's Antigone we must look to for the elements of the tragedy.

Let us consider the similarity between Antigone and Oedipus. Both claim to know justice with all the certainty of a God. Oedipus believes in his strength, intelligence, and cunning; Antigone believes in her goodness. The hubris is easy to spot in Oedipus but it is easy to overlook in Antigone. As stated previously the main focus of the play is actually on Creon so it's natural to focus on him. We know what will happen to Antigone very early in the play so there isn't the dramatic tension to lure our curiosity towards her. She has recognised a noble and heroic truth and maintains it with courage. She asserts God's law.

Creon on the other hand understands the needs of his city emerging from a civil war. He places importance on order and will do whatever is necessary. His problem is that he made his decree forbidding the burial of Polynices before he was aware of Antigone's guilt. To compromise on his decree for her would compromise him for all future decrees or proclamations and all claims to the fairness of his rule. In spite of this he listens to the Chorus and Tiresias, struggles with the issues, and is able to reconsider. Antigone recognises the demands of true justice and becomes its champion. She even spurns her sister for not recognising it. She is even able to leave her fiancée Haemon as she does with Ismene, even though he willingly disobeys his father and refuses to live without her.

Antigone is loved by Ismene and Haemon, and yet she complains she is alone and friendless:

Antigone: O lordly sons of my city! O Thebes!...no friend to weep at my banishment to a rock-hewn chamber of endless duration...

What she is doing is comparing her fate to that of Niobe (a stone image weeping on a cliff near Thebes) while completely overlooking the fact that it was hubris that destroyed Niobe. It is the Chorus that give us the clues to Antigone's hubris:

Chorus: She shows her father's stubborn spirit: foolish not to give way when everything's against her.

It is in fact the Chorus that tell her of her hubris

Chorus: An act of homage is good in itself, my daughter; but authority cannot afford to connive at disobedience. You are the victim of your own self will.

Antigone's flaw is that she follows the truth that comes only from herself. She is a law unto herself, she is the lone individual refusing to be swayed by anybody. For her knowledge and judgement are a personal affair. Rather than see the limitations of her own understanding Antigone becomes only more extreme.

Antigone: O but I would not have done the forbidden thing for any husband or any son. For why? I could have had another husband and by him other sons. if one were lost; but, father and mother lost, where would I get another brother?

She even goes to the point of denying Ismene's existence

Antigone: Last daughter of your royal house go I, his prisoner...

Where Antigone differs to Aristotle's formulae for Tragedy, is Antigone refuses to see her fault. Creon who has pride can finally see it as a fault, Antigone doesn't recognise it as such. If she does have a moment's recognition she doesn't see it as a fault but as a weakness that she must overcome. It's a brief interlude in the play in her last major speech:

Antigone: So to my grave, my bridal bower, my everlasting prison, I go...

It's here that she realises she has to die due to her pride or hubris. However as this speech progresses we see the realisation doesn't last, firstly she goes into denial

Antigone: What law of heaven have I transgressed? What God can save me now?

What help or hope have I, in whom devotion is deemed sacrilege?

And the denial then turns to anger

Antigone: If this is God's will I shall learn my lesson in death; but if my enemies are wrong, I wish them no worse punishment than mine.

It is now the Chorus that show Antigone where she has 'sinned' by alluding to Dryas' son, and Phineus' wife. They suffered due to their hubris but were able to survive. Antigone doesn't listen. She doesn't want to as she doesn't see the need to take advice. She believes she's right.

Sophocles has told the story of both Oedipus and Antigone and the chorus does compare the two; particularly their individuality and resoluteness. For Oedipus the tragedy is unavoidable. Even if he deliberated it wouldn't have helped him much. Antigone could have avoided her fate. Sophocles created a character that to remain tragic, depended on her failing to see her own faults.

It cannot be questioned that the play is about justice. Sophocles doesn't ask us to identify justice, he asks how do we know it? If we are ever to know it, is there something we can learn from Antigone's fate? If we first look at Creon we see a man who believes that justice requires priority to order and the people, not to any individual. He believes that law must be applied without exceptions. Yet even so Creon is willing to discuss the issue, to doubt his certainty. Creon can, and does reconsider.

Antigone believes she has found a higher justice, it isn't open to discussion and she has no doubts. She is under the illusion that only she can see and perceive true (or higher) justice. In her mind, since she's the only one with this insight, then the logical conclusion in her mind is that she doesn't belong to this world. She has no other choice than to be martyr. Her unwillingness to discuss, take advice, compromise, or have self doubt has secured her own destruction.

Antigone's flaw is subtle, and also appealing. She has discovered a truth and therefore we are compelled to agree with her. In doing so we also identify with her. The danger is that when one discovers a truth there is the temptation to think one has discovered them all. So if we discover one of God's truths (as Antigone did) does that mean we have discovered them all? If one thinks one has discovered the mind of God, it's relatively easy to begin to think of one's own will as God's will. Because of this certainty and appeal others may follow. Ismene believes that Antigone is right and she is willing to die with her sister. In reality Ismene would be just another victim of Antigone's hubris.

If Sophocles wanted Antigone to portray the heroic ideal, why did he create this flaw in her? The answer lies in that we're all flawed. To not have a flaw would make us 'divine' and therefore not human. The lesson of Antigone is that we are all flawed and we must recognise and accept it.

Sources, and further reading

A concise history of Greece - Alexander Eliot (Cassell)
Aeschylus and Athens - George Thomson (Lawrence & Wishart)
Aeschylus The Orestian Trilogy - P. Vellacot (Penguin)
An introduction to Greek Theatre - P.D. Arnott M.A. Ph.D.(Macmillan)
Ancient Greek Literature in its living context - H.C. Baldry
Ancient Law - Henry Maine
Colliers Encyclopaedia,
Encyclopaedia Britannica
Euripides Medea/Hecabe/Electra/Heracles - P. Vellacot (Penguin)
Euripides The Bacchae and other plays - P. Vellacot (Penguin)
From Solon to Socrates - Victor Ehrenberg (Richard Clay Ltd)
Greek Tragedy - H.D.F.Kitto (Methuen)
Greek Tragedy - Prof. Albin Lesky (Barnes and Noble)
Greek Philosophy Thales to Plato - John Burnet (Macmillan)
Humanitus Volume 12 No.1. 1999
Histories - Herodotus (Wordsworth)
Journal of Hellenic Studies Vols LXVIII & LXXIV - Prof. R.P. Winnington - Ingram
Lysistrata/The Archarnians/The Clouds - Aristophanes trans: Baldick, Jones, & Radice (Penguin)
New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology
Poetics - Aristotle (Dover)
Sophocles - Cedric H. Whitman (Harvard)
Sophocles Antigone - Richard Emil Braun (Oxford)
Sophocles The Theban Plays - E.F. Watling (Penguin)
The Greek Experiment - Robert.J.Littman (Thames)
The Greek Myths (Vol 1 &2) - Robert Graves (Pelican)
The dream of reason - Anthony Gottlieb (Allen lane/the Penguin Press)
The history of Greek Philosophy - Luciano De Crescenzo (Picador)
The history of the Peloponnesian War - Thucydides (Wordsworth Classics)
The Persians of Aeschylus - T.G. Tucker C.M.G.,Litt. D. (University of Melbourne Press)
The Rise and Fall of Athens - Plutarch (Penguin Classics)