Antigone – The Problem of Violence

Part 3 – A Sacrificial Solution

Watch video, Part 3 – A Sacrificial Solution, at the beginning of class.

Introduce the Exercise
This play is a tragedy not because the good guy (or gal) lost. The ending is tragic for both Antigone and Creon. Sophocles shows us a tragic outcome because the problem of restoring peace after a civil war is real and difficult to achieve. Both Creon and Antigone believe that they are following the “will of the gods”. Yet each believes that the gods require something very different from them.

Complete “A Sacrificial Solution” Worksheet
Divide the class into two groups, one representing Antigone and one Creon.

Group Presentations
After completing the worksheet, each group presents its findings.

Class Discussion
Lead the entire class in a discussion by asking the following questions:

  o Which arguments are you sympathetic to?
  o Which do you disagree with?
  o Antigone is often described as following a “higher law” while Creon is said to be following “human laws”. Looking at your answers on the worksheet, how would you describe the different methods used by human laws and a higher law?
  o What is our responsibility to both human law and a higher law?

Conclude:
In Antigone, Sophocles offers us a dramatization of the way that human law creates order through violence and scapegoating. The play continues to be relevant because we are still wrestling with the same problems of how to create sustainable peace without dehumanizing and sacrificing some for the sake of the entire community.
Optional Exercise:

Ask your students to think of examples where this conflict between human law and a higher law is playing out today. You can offer examples from American history to get the ball rolling, such as conscientious objectors vs. the draft board during the Vietnam war or civil disobedience vs. segregation laws during the Civil Rights movement.

Choose a current example and ask:

- How is violence being justified?
- What arguments or actions are being used to challenge the justification of violence?
- Who is being dehumanized and by what methods?
- Who is trying to reclaim their humanity and by what methods?
- What would Creon say about this situation?
- What would Antigone say about this situation?
- What do you say?
Prof. McKenna: “We are still in this play. We have not solved the problem it raises about how to keep the peace and establish/restore order without a sacrificial solution.”

Please respond as your character – Antigone or Creon – to the following:

What does the “will of the gods” mean to you?

Why is your course of action pleasing to the gods?

Who or what are you willing to sacrifice in order to follow the will of the gods as you understand it?

Describe the circumstances in which the gods approve of the use of violence.

What is at stake if you do not succeed?