Antigone And Power Essay, Research Paper

?Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely,? said Lord Acton

generations ago. In the Greek tragedy Antigone, written by Sophocles, there was

a character named Kreon, the antagonist, who was the king of Thebes. Thebes was

an autocratic state where Kreon had absolute power. Throughout the course of the

play, Kreon abused his privilege of absolute power; and this caused him to

suffer greatly, even though he was warned by a few people of his bad deeds. What

Sophocles commented on absolute power was that one should not abuse it. If it

was abused, he or she had to expect bad consequences. This was indicated by what

happened to Kreon when he abused his power. Kreon settled a decree that

prohibited anyone from burying Polyneices? dead body. He was proud of his

decree, and he also stated that he would be a good king by listening to what

people said regarding his decisions. When the decree was broken by Antigone,

Kreon sentenced her to death. This angered the gods because they wanted the dead

body of Polyneices buried, and they did not want a live body (that of Antigone)

buried in a cave. Kreon was told by Haimon to change his mind, but Kreon

rejected his request and went ahead and buried Antigone alive. Teiresias warned

Kreon that the gods were angry and his actions were to be blamed. Kreon rejected

both Haimon?s request and Teiresias? warning, and as a result, he suffered

in the end. In the beginning of the play, Antigone and Ismene were found arguing

about whether Polyneices? body should be buried. Antigone wanted to bury her

brother?s body, but Ismene objected because she said that they should not

disobey Kreon, who had absolute power and had prohibited Polyneices? burial

(26-80). Ismene indicated that the citizens of Thebes did not dare to go against

what Kreon decreed. They all knew that if they objected to Kreon, punishment

would be the result. In the play, Kreon was first found addressing the senate as

to how a ruler should rule his state. He said in his long speech, ??I

believe that he who rules in a state and fails to embrace the best men?s

counsels, but stays locked in silence and vague fear, is the worst man there. I

have long believed so?? (217-221). To impress the senate Kreon told them

that he would listen to any advice they gave him because that was what a good

ruler should do. However, this was not how he reacted when Kreon heard that

somebody buried Polyneices? body. While he was talking to the senate, a sentry

came in and told Kreon that Polyneices? body had been buried.

??…somebody up and buried the corpse and went off: sprinkled dust over it

and did the ceremonies you?re supposed to?? (310-312). Kreon got very

angry and threatened to kill the sentry if he didn?t find the culprit who had

buried the body. Kreon thought that all of the sentries were bribed into not

telling him who was the culprit (372-391). Koryphaios suggested that the gods

might have had buried the body: ??My lord, we have been considering whether

a god might not have done this?? (350-351). Just like a dictator, as if he

knew the actions of the gods, he declared that it was impossible for the gods to

honor (bury) criminals (363-364). He defied what Koryphaios had said and just

declared that the gods would never bury Polyneices, and he got his way. Before,

Kreon had said that a good ruler like himself would listen to people, but Kreon

did not do that. He went against what he had said. This showed that Kreon was

very hypocritical, and he always only declared what he thought was right. Some

time passed, and the sentry came in the palace with Antigone, who had buried

Polyneices out of sheer respect. Kreon asked her if she really went against the

decree, and Antigone denied nothing. ?Yes, because I did not believe that Zeus

was the one who proclaimed it; neither did Justice, or the gods of the dead whom

Justice lives among. The laws they have made for men are well marked out. I

didn?t suppose your decree had strength enough, or you, who are human, to

violate the lawful traditions the gods have not written merely, but made

infallible.? (550-558) Antigone said that the choice of burying Polyneices or

not was not in the hands of humans. When a person died, the gods expected the

body to be buried so that they could take it to the underworld. A dead body was

the property of the gods. Burial was a tradition the gods had set for the

people, and it was to be be continued. Kreon acted selfishly, abused his power,

and went against the will of the gods to get his wish. As a reaction to

Antigone?s infallible concept of burial, Kreon said, ??…these stiff

minds are the first to collapse. Fire-tempered iron, the strongest and the

toughest, that?s the kind you most often see snapped and shattered??

(578-580). Ironically, what Kreon said applied to himself. Kreon himself was

stiff-minded about Polyneices not to be buried. Like all dictators, Kreon did

not realize his stubbornness because he thought he was always right. Another

case of when Kreon rejected other?s suggestions was in the scene with his son,

Haimon. Kreon explained to Haimon the situation Antigone was in and the death

penalty, and Haimon objected too it. Haimon said that he did respect Kreon a lot

as a leader, but he said that in this situation, ??perhaps a second opinion

will be valuable?? (832). Haimon thought that ??no one is more innocent,

no death more awful, no deeds more noble than hers?? (841-843). Haimon

kindly asked Kreon to change his mind for once and accept what others had to say

and not give Antigone the death sentence. Kreon lost his mind and didn?t

accept what Haimon said, and Kreon claimed that only he was right. Again, he

went against what he said earlier in the play about listening to other people.

Kreon and Haimon argued more, and Haimon left by saying that Antigone?s death

will bring about other deaths, and Kreon would never see him again (908, 924).

After Haimon left, Kreon ordered for Antigone to be locked in a cave. According

to tradition, the gods had a right over dead bodies, but they did not want live

bodies buried or killed. This was exactly what Kreon was doing to Antigone. He

went against the will of the gods, the most high, and angered them. He abused

his power by not making decisions with other people, and he just wanted things

his own way even though they were not for him to handle. After Antigone was

locked in the cave, a prophet named Teiresias came to inform Kreon about his

deeds. Teiresias told Kreon that once again he was walking on thin ice.

Teiresias had heard weird noises of birds ??squawking in an evil

frenzy?? (1155). He told Kreon that he had tried to perform a sacrifice, but

the ritual had failed. Teiresias informed Kreon that the ??state is

sick?? (1170) and that Kreon?s code of conduct was to be blamed. He also

said that it was not too late to undo his terrible deed of burying someone who

was living and not burying someone who was dead. Kreon replied to all this by

saying that the prophet had been bribed by someone to say what he said, so that

Antigone would be set free (1171-1223). Once more, Kreon rejected advice from a

holy figure and did what he favored. Teiresias was known not to have had ever

lied, so his statements were true. Kreon was not being fair and Teiresias warned

him of that, but he still didn?t change and misused his power. Teiresias

mentioned to Kreon, just before Teiresias left, that Kreon had dishonored a

living soul by putting Antigone into exile in the cave. He also stated that

matters that had to be taken care of by the gods were out of his hands and that

??a crime of violence is being done?? (1249), and Kreon was in charge of

it. Teiresias ended by saying that that was why evil will pursue Kreon

(1243-1250). By the end of the play, Kreon found out that both Antigone and

Haimon had committed suicide. When Kreon?s wife, Eurydice, found out about her

son, she committed suicide too. As the result of Kreon?s bad code of conduct

and his constant abusing of his power, he had three dead bodies. He was

responsible for all those deaths. By the end of the plot, Kreon learned an

important lesson. He realized that he had been wrong, and his son had been right

(1464). ??I have learned, and I am ruined. It was a god. Then, right

then!?? (1466-1467). The gods became very angry at Kreon because he went

against their traditions and abused his absolute power. He did this by doing

what he favored, regardless of the gods? rules, which was to bury a live soul

and let a dead body rot in the open. He was being very hypocritical by not

listening to anyone regarding his decisions; he himself had said a good ruler

like him would listen to people. In the denouement, he had three dead bodies,

and their deaths broke his heart. However, he was completely responsible for

their deaths, and he could have prevented them. Sophocles made it certain that

if one abused his or her power, it would bring adverse results, like what

happened to Kreon. Kreon learned an important lesson from his suffering.

Aeschylus once said, ?By suffering comes wisdom.?