Notes on *Antigone*

The German philosopher George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel believed that the conflict is not “right against wrong” but rather a collision between the two highest moral codes—the rightful demands of the family—love, loyalty, and duty—versus those of the state: “Each of the two sides realizes only one of the moral powers…[and the tragedy is] that both [positions] end in injustice because they are one sided” (80).

**Antigone’s Case**

The Upside

- Regarding the burial of Polynices, she is right and Creon is wrong
- She acts bravely, persisting on a course that she knows will bring her suffering, even death
- Her actions are not for any private gain
- She persists in spite of the fact that her actions isolate her from everyone else

The Downside

- She seems too eager for martyrdom
- She is too headstrong
- She is arrogant, flaunting her superiority over Ismene
- The gods she reveres most are those of the Underworld who represent “instinctive powers of feeling, love, and blood, not the daylight gods who represent a free, self-conscious life of nation and people”

**Creon’s Case**

The Upside

- He is new to the throne and his inexperience makes him suspicious, uneasy, and quick to act
- As a new ruler he indeed has the responsibility of maintaining order in a city that has recently undergone a civil war
• His decree not to bury Polynices is not borne out of a personal hatred but the belief that the gods couldn’t possibly sympathize with a man who came to the city to burn their shrines
• Although he repents, he is terribly punished by the deaths of his son and wife and the knowledge that these deaths as well as Antigone’s are his sole responsibility

The Downside

• He is wrong in ordering Polynices not to be buried
• He is sexist and ageist
• He is arrogant, refusing to take sound advice from his son, the prophet Teiresias, and the citizenry of Thebes
• He believes that the city is his personal property so that his word is law, just or not

Works Cited