Philip Dumaresq The Characters of Antigone and Creon.

“Antigone”, by Sophocles, is about the repercussions of the battle between two brothers, Polynices and Eteocles and the murder of each other by the other’s hand. In the aftermath of their deaths, the city of Thebes is left without a king and so the uncle of the brothers, Creon, takes up the role of the ruling of the city. He proceeds to declare soon after that Eteocles, having been the current king of the city, should be named a hero and to have died in protection of Thebes, and Polynices, having murdered him, to be left alone, have no burial, and left to rot in his place of death. Antigone is about the sister of the two men who defies her uncle and buries Polynices; she then faces the wrath of Creon who unwaveringly from his proclamation to sentence anyone who buries Polynices to death, does so for Antigone.

Creon has become the king of Thebes and must make a decision about how to treat the battle between his two nephews. They had made an agreement and Eteocles has not abided by it. Eteocles has sworn to Polynices that year by year they would relinquish the duties of kingship to each other and rules Thebes side by side. However after the first year, Eteocles refuses to step down and so Polynices gathers men to fight against his brother. Polynices and his 6 men are killed along with Eteocles in the battle and so Creon takes up the role of being king. Creon believes in the divine power of the king and so believes that his word will be ignored by none. “’*Eteocles, who in this city's quarrel fought and fell. The foremost of our champions in the fray. They should entomb with the full sanctity of rites that solemnize the downward road of their dead greatest. Him the while, his brother, that Polynices who, returning home a banished man, sought to lay waste with fire his household Gods, his native country — sought to glut himself with his own kindred's blood, or carry them away to slavery, it has been promulgated to the city no man shall bury, none should wail for him; unsepulchred, shamed in the eyes of men. his body shall be left to be devoured by dogs and fowls of the air. Such is my will.*’” -Sophocles 4. This is the decision made by Creon after the battle between Eteocles and Polynices. He declares Polynices to have done wrong to the city and so claims that anyone who will be caught burying his body, or respecting and honouring him will be sentenced to death. He believes in the order and peace of the city and wishes only that his people be happy in his old years as king. He wishes for Antigone to live, however he also cannot let others see this and interpret it as his orders are to be taken lightly. To have order, you must have that order maintained and for those who defy your word to be punished. And so reluctantly, rather than have Antigone become a symbol of defiance towards the king, he sentences her to death so that his word will be known to be followed. Creon is typically viewed as the primary antagonist in this play, even though his killing Antigone was not what he wished to do.

Antigone believes in the order of the gods and that their wishes are greater than those of the king. The gods in the Greek tradition have said that everyone needs a proper burial. To not have one is both an insult the dignity of the deceased and that it allows the dead to find their way to the underworld. The gods wish for all to have a proper burial and their word is such that everyone gets one, and so Antigone, defying the word of Creon, obeys the gods and not the king and goes to bury her brother. *“Ismene- ‘I am not one to cover things with scorn but I was born too feeble to contend against the state.’ Antigone- ‘Yes, you can put that forward; but I will go and heap a burial mound over my most dear brother.’”* -Sophocles 8. This is a conversation between Ismene and Antigone before Antigone goes and buries Polynices. Ismene is used as a juxtaposition to show Antigone’s bravery in going to bury Polynices. While she is not able to stand up for what she believes, she supports Antigone in going and burying their brother. Creon has threatened anyone who does this however with the sentence of death. Antigone, in the face of possible death, rises beyond that and goes out to bury her brother. Ismene, here, warns her that she will get caught and; yet Antigone faces this danger and buries him. Inevitably, she gets caught by guards ordered to watch the body of Polynices and is brought to the king. She denies nothing and bravely faces the consequences that follow her actions.

Both Antigone and Creon are character who can be seen as the antagonist or protagonist of this story. Antigone who defies the law and buries her father can be seen as a youthful rebel and should therefore be punished. Death may be extreme, but regardless she shouldn’t get away with it. Then there’s Creon who must establish order in a broken city and is struggling to do so. He must establish his power and show that the law is not to be broken while he is in power. Both can be seen as a protagonist in this story. Creon wishes for the people of the city to be happy, but being king he must establish order and make it known that his word is to be law. He does not want to harm Antigone. “*How might this be, that she was seen, and taken in the act?’” -*Sophocles 16. Creon is unable to believe that Antigone would do such a thing and as such is very is very taken aback and doesn’t believe the sentinel. He has to ask Antigone himself to believe that she did it and still yet after that had to ask if she was aware that she was breaking the law. “’*Be she of my sister born, or nearer to myself than the whole band of our domestic tutelary jove, she, and the sister - for her equally I charge with compassing this funeral – shall not escape a most tremendous doom.’”* –Sophocles 18. Creon here has made the assumption that Ismene was a part of burying Polynices, although he later drops accusations against her. He says Antigone is very close to him and he loves her very much and it’s unfortunate that he has to make her meet her in this way. Antigone however believes that the divine order of the gods is greater than the orders of the king and so buries her father. This is a decision made both from her morals. Not only is it to please the gods, but this is her brother. She must honour him and the life he lived. This may have been against the order of Creon, but this was something she felt must get done and she is aware of the possible consequences.

In conclusion, Antigone is a story about morals, a story about ethics and personal philosophies and it explores very early ideas that we today see as being obvious to us. We must decide between Creon and Antigone about who is the protagonist of this story. We must decide whose morals we agree with. Whether or not we should follow the law set in place for us or whether or not we should follow our own and do what we believe is right. Antigone makes us make this choice between two characters that are there to juxtapose each other. The morals that Creon brings forth with the need to follow order set in place by leaders and the morals Antigone shows us about following you faith, following your own rules and following your hearth.

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