

Theatre and Argument

Sophocles, *Antigone*

Lecture Objectives

- **Objective 1:** identify the subject of morality
- **Objective 2:** compare theatre with philosophy
 - *Antigone* is a theatre play and not a work of philosophy
- **Objective 3:** compare film and speech-giving with philosophy

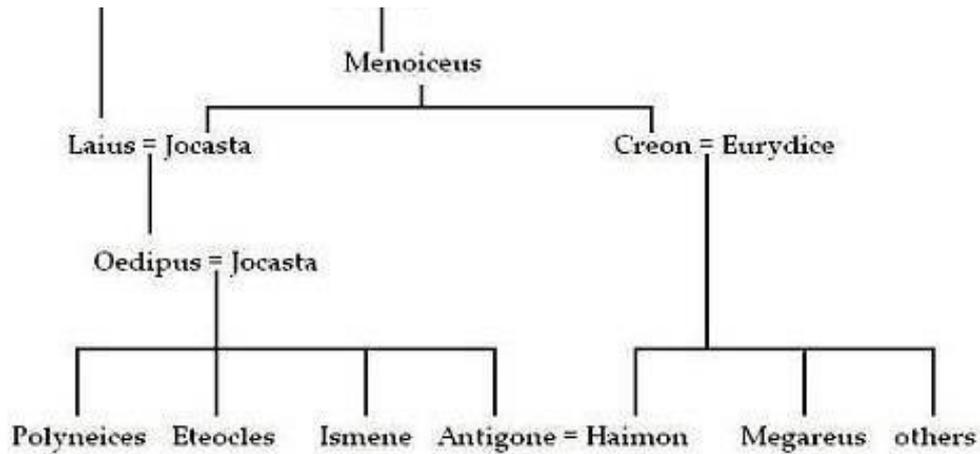
Ethics / Morality

- The next two weeks, we discuss ethics and political philosophy
- Here are some familiar ethical/moral concepts
 - moral, immoral; just, unjust
 - good, bad, evil
 - obligatory, forbidden, permissible
 - duty, civic duty, military duty
 - virtuous, vicious: brave, courageous, weak, cowardly, honest
 - pious, impious; holy, unholy
- Ethical principles are not legal laws; laws are instituted because they are moral
 - For example, the killing an innocent human being for no reason whatsoever is illegal; the reason it is illegal because it is morally wrong to do so.

Ethics

- Ethics is an area of philosophy concerned with moral action
- The most fundamental questions in this area are
 - How *should* humans act?
 - Why *should* they act one way and not another?
 - What is the best sort of life?

Genealogical Tree



Plot

- King Oedipus' self-exile in Thebes
- His two sons, Eteocles and Polynices, fight in a civil war. They kill each other. No male left to take over the throne. So, Creon (their uncle) takes over.
- Creon institutes a law: Eteocles shall be buried according to ritual. Polynices (and other enemies of the state) shall NOT be given proper burial.
- Antigone (Polynices sister) disobeys the law; she is caught; defiantly objects
- Creon's punishment for Antigone's defiance and breaking law: death
- Haemon (Antigone's fiance, Creon's son) pleads for Antigone's life; his plea is rejected
- Antigone kills herself
- Not knowing of Antigone's suicide, Creon reconsiders his verdict, but it's too late
- Haemon kills himself after discovering Antigone dead
- Creon abdicates throne

Moral Issues in *Antigone*

- What should Creon do?
 - Should he have denied Polynices burial? Is this a bad or impious law?
 - What should Creon do when his law is openly criticized by a subordinate (Antigone)?
- What should Antigone do?
 - Should Antigone disobey Creon's law?
 - How should Antigone fight against Creon and his law?

Playwrights Message

- What is Sophocles' message on these moral issue?
 - The Play ends with these words of wisdom:
 - CHORUS LEADER (FILM): All happiness must be crowned with wisdom and reverence for divine law. The proud words of the great are paid with great disaster to teach them prudence though too late.
 - But, there is no obvious answer to the question
- There are many different interpretations of this play
 - Some people claim that Antigone was right
 - Some claim that Creon did the right thing
 - Others claim that they both did the right thing

Morality in Theatre and Film

- As we saw at the center of the play *Antigone*, there are several moral issues
- Moral issues are also at the center of many other Greek tragedies and modern films
- Wallstreet (1987)
 - Film stock-broker and ruthless investors, who believe that greed is good

Wallstreet (1987)



Political Speeches

- Moral issues also take center stage in political speeches
- Obama speech prior to election
 - A speech about helping the poor and in general not being greedy
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFPwDe22CoY>

Speeches and Persuasion

- *Antigone* depicts different ways of persuasion
- Sophists
 - Professional (paid) Teachers
 - Taught speakers the art of persuasion or giving speeches
 - Sometimes were paid to give speeches on someone's behalf
 - Could be political speeches, or speeches in law courts
- Antigone (defiant; speaking truth to power)
- Haemon (subordinate; nuanced, gentle persuasion)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suN2Pq6qoKE> [40:00]

Criticism of Theatre and Speech-Giving

- Theatre, film and speech-giving are influential means of changing the minds of viewers especially on moral issues
- Philosophy has a number of criticism against all three
- **Criticism 1: Interpretation**
 - There are often many different interpretations of theatre, speeches, and film. So, it is difficult to figure out what the author or director had in mind
 - A method that did
- **Criticism 2: Often very little reasoning given as to why a moral view should be adopted**
- **Criticism 3: No direct engagement with audience, so they do not examine people's own views**
- Philosophical methods hope to do better!

Philosophical Methodology

Argumentation

Philosophical Method

- There are two components of philosophical methods that we will talk about in this class
 - 1. Argumentation or reasoning: today's class
 - 2. Definitions: see *Euthyphro* (next class)

Argument Form

1. [← Premise
2. [← Premise
3. Therefore, [← Conclusion

The premises are the reasons (or support) for the conclusion

We could ask: why is the conclusion true? It is because the premises are true.

Arguments in Informal Language

- We express arguments (reasoning) in informal language in often obscure ways. So, we need to first convert informal language into the argument form

- Example (Hamlet):

Neither a borrower nor lender be
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.

- What is the argument here?

1. If you loan to someone, then you will lose your money and your friend [Premise]
2. Borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry (house-hold management) [Premise]
3. Therefore, do not borrow from someone, nor lend to anyone [Conclusion]

Kinds of Arguments

- Deductive Arguments (often used in mathematics)
- Inductive Arguments (often used in science)

Inductive Arguments

1. A pinch of salt dissolved in water at time t_1
2. Another pinch of salt dissolved in water at time t_2
3.
4. Another pinch of salt dissolved in water at time t_{100}
5. Therefore, all salt dissolves in water

- Note: the conclusion could be false; it could be true that even though I observed salt dissolve in water 100 times, it could still turn out that on the 101 try, it does not dissolve.
- Inductive arguments establish only a **probable** conclusion; **probably** all salt dissolves in water

Deductive Arguments

1. All men are mortal
 2. Socrates is a man
 3. Therefore, Socrates is mortal
- Note: deductive arguments establish a certain conclusions assuming that the premises are true: If all men are mortal and Socrates is indeed a man, then **it must be** the case that Socrates is mortal
 - Mathematical proofs (e.g. in geometry, calculus) are one kind of proof

- An *inductive argument* =df assuming that the premises are true, the conclusion is **probably (not certainly)** true
- An *deductive* or *valid* argument =_{df} assuming that the premises are true, the conclusion ***must necessarily (certainly)*** be true.
- We want inductive or deductive arguments with true premises

Philosophical Method

- We started by observing that moral issues are central to theatre, film and political speeches
- We also notes some criticisms of these approaches
- Argumentation (inductive and deductive) was then introduced as an improvement
- Why is it an improvement?
 - 1. argumentation does not require as much interpretation as plays, films or spechs
 - 2. in argumentation, reasoning is the only thing that matters, as opposed to how well a play, film is written or performed; what matters is the why.
 - 3. arguments can be discussed with other people to see whether they work or not; plays and film cannot