

HERTOG 2020 SUMMER COURSES

SOPHOCLES' *ANTIGONE*

Antón Barba-Kay, professor, Catholic University of America

If politics is not total, then what are its boundaries? How does the human condition shape politics, and how does politics in turn shape the human condition? If political communities bear opinions, customs, and laws from generation to generation, then what is its relationship to the *first* human community, the community that provides generations, namely, the family?

This seminar considers these questions by way of a careful reading of Sophocles' *Antigone*. The characters of this tragedy offer different and conflicting understandings of the familial, the divine, the political, and their proper relationships. Our work will be to consider and question these different understandings, and in doing so, examine the limits of politics.

Books:

- Sophocles, *Antigone*, in *Sophocles I: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus*, eds. David Grene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013)

Discussion Papers: Each fellow will be responsible for completing a brief discussion paper (1-2 pages, single-spaced). See below for your assignment. Papers are due the day before your assigned session by **5 PM ET**. They should be posted on the course Slack channel and will be part of the assigned readings for the session. Paper-writers should be ready to briefly present their ideas during the seminar.

Resources

To learn more about the ideas and figures discussed in this course, we encourage you to explore a project supported by the Hertog Foundation: **The Great Thinkers** (<http://thegreatthinkers.org/>) and **Contemporary Thinkers** (<http://contemporarythinkers.org/>) websites. These sites are aimed at introducing important thinkers in Western thought, with a particular emphasis on politics and philosophy.

Tuesday, July 14, 2020

1 p.m. to 3 p.m. ET

Violation

Readings:

- Excerpt from Virginia Woolf, "On Not Knowing Greek"
- Sophocles, *Antigone*, vv. 1–331

Reading Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. What is Antigone's understanding of familial love such that she buries her brother *and* disowns her sister?
2. What is Ismene's criticism of Antigone's intention? Is it correct?
3. What is Creon's motivation for the injunction against burying Polynices? What does it suggest about his understanding of familial love?

Thursday, July 16, 2020

1 p.m. to 3 p.m. ET

Ode to Man

Readings:

- Sophocles, *Antigone*, vv. 332–630 (up to Haemon's entrance)
- Various translations of the "Ode to Man"

Reading Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. In light of the Chorus's ode how are we to understand Antigone's undertaking? Ismene's response? Creon's rule?
2. Why do human beings err? What may be the sources of our blindness?

Monday, July 20, 2020

1 p.m. to 3 p.m. ET

Confrontation

Readings:

- Sophocles, *Antigone*, vv. 631–1114 (up to Chorus)

Reading Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. What do we learn of Creon's understanding of familial love from his conversation with Haemon?
2. How do Antigone and Creon each view her own and his own agency? What is at stake in the intransigence of each?
3. What is responsible for the change in Antigone from her penultimate to her final speech?
4. Are there any examples of unqualifiedly admirable love in the play?
5. What does Antigone most dread? What does Creon?

Wednesday, July 22, 2020

1 p.m. to 3 p.m. ET

Conclusion

Readings:

- Sophocles, *Antigone*, vv. 1115–end

Reading Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. Why does Creon repeatedly blame money as the motivation for supposed violations of his rule?
2. What does Creon see after Tiresias' speech? What does he learn from the final moments/deaths of the play?
3. What can we surmise about the fate of Thebes after the events of the tragedy?

Friday, July 24, 2020

1 p.m. to 3 p.m. ET

Recapitulation

Readings:

- Review the *Antigone* in its entirety
- Excerpt from Pierre Manent, *Metamorphoses of the City*

Reading Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. What are the different visions of the divine, the familial, and the political offered in the play?
2. What does the play suggest about the limitations of the political? What does it suggest about the transgression of those limitations?
3. What is tragic about *Antigone*?