



Lessons in Greek Mythology: Hubris

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If you read, hear, or learn about almost any Greek myth, then you may have realized that there tends to be a pattern in the themes, or messages, of the stories. This common theme revolves around one word – hubris, and why you should stay away from it. To quote Percy Jackson when he first heard the word, “that brown stuff you spread on veggie sandwiches?” I’ll admit, the word hubris does sound a whole lot like the word hummus, but as Annabeth responded, “Hubris is worse... hubris means deadly pride, Percy.” And indeed, that is a valid explanation of what hubris is.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines hubris as “exaggerated pride or self confidence.” So how does this all tie into Greek mythology? Well look at almost any Greek cautionary tale, or Greek hero, often both, and you will notice that hubris was their ultimate downfall. I could go on with myth after myth and how they show this, but for the sake of brevity, I will choose three stories I personally enjoy. The first is the story of Icarus, and probably the most famous of these. The second is the story of Jason and the Argonauts, another generally well known story. The last is one of my favorites, though many people I speak to don’t seem to recognize the name, and that is the story of Bellerophon.

The story of Icarus is well known, and a fairly short one. A great inventor, the best, Daedalus, is hired to create a labyrinth to trap a great beast. The only problem is that no one is allowed to know the secrets of the labyrinth, and so Daedalus is trapped in the center of the labyrinth with his son Icarus. To escape this prison, Daedalus does what he does best - invent. He creates two sets of wings made out of wax and feathers, for the two of them to fly out of their open-air prison. Before they make their escape, Daedalus warns Icarus that if he flies too low the dampness of the sea will clog the wings, but if he flies too high then the sun will melt the wax. This is a warning against complacency - flying too low, or thinking too lowly of yourself, as well as a warning against hubris - flying too high.

And as anyone who knows this story has heard, Icarus gets excited and flies up high, melting the wax, and forcing Daedalus to watch his son plummet to his death. In this example, Icarus is struck down by his hubris - thinking that he is immortal, and disregarding his father’s warning.

The most common reference including Jason is that of the Argonauts, or those sailing on the ship Argo to obtain the golden fleece. However, that is a story for another day. Jason has many stories attached to his name; all of which are long and vary greatly, as is the custom with oral traditions. In order to get the fleece, Jason receives help from the beautiful Medea,

who then escapes with Jason and a promise of marriage. Later, they are happily married with two children, but Jason wants more. Upon his return, for long political reasons involving a lot of murder, Jason is not welcome to rule his old kingdom. So he starts courting the princess of another kingdom with the intention of marrying her and becoming king. When Medea gets wind of her husband’s shenanigans, she is exiled with access only to her own children, who she murders to hurt Jason, as well as killing the princess. Jason dies alone and sad, as the rotting hull of the Argo collapses on top of him. Putting aside the incredible meaning and irony of Jason being killed by the decomposing personification of his only great achievement, this also shows great hubris. Jason thinks he can have everything--a woman he loves, glory, children, and a kingdom. However in his own pride, he loses all of it.

Bellerophon is often referenced in tandem with a better well known character of Greek mythology-Pegasus. Winning favor with the gods, Bellerophon is given a golden halter to put on the great Pegasus, which tames the creature. Bellerophon then completes quests to prove his worth, until the day he decides to fly his magical winged horse up to Mount Olympus as if he is a god. Zeus is offended, as Bellerophon is a mere demigod, and has no place in the home of the gods. And so Zeus strikes Bellerophon down with a lightning bolt. Bellerophon exhibits hubris when he thinks he is worthy of visiting the home of the gods, and the teaching moment, where he learns his lesson, is when he is stricken down from the sky with a lightning bolt.

Hubris seems to be the main driving force for most Greek stories, as shown by these three examples. Other examples would be the story of Sisyphus, Tantalus, Ariadne, Achilles, and many, many more. But why did the Greeks teach this lesson over and over instead of other lessons that we now might consider just as important, or even more so? This has to do with their belief system. The gods were moody, and any show of hubris at all would be severely punished by them. There was nothing the gods hated more than a mortal who thought themselves better than a god, because the gods thrived on mortals worshiping them. If mortals could be as good at anything as a god, then there would be no point in worship, and so hubris was the ultimate crime.

This isn’t to say that other lessons weren’t taught in Greek myths. Every Greek story is individually packed with lessons, if you look hard enough, and many don’t even include hubris. But hubris is, and will always be, one of the important and most often taught lessons in Greek mythology.

Shelter Overload

Katie Jenkins, Junior

According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty of Animals (ASPCA), about 44% of all American households own dogs, and an overall estimated 78 million dogs are owned in the US. This seems like a lot of dogs, and it is, yet there are still about 70 million homeless dogs in just America, with shelters euthanizing about 920,000 unadopted animals.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, many people adopted what are referred to as “Pandemic Puppies.” Over 23 million American families adopted pets during the COVID-19 pandemic. These pets were adopted during a time when people had a lot of time on their hands to fill, but as the world returns to somewhat of a state of normalcy, people’s time has decreased. In Philadelphia, shelters and rescue organizations, such as The Philly Bully Team, are reporting an increase in people wanting to return their pets. Jessica Mellen-Graaf reports that in one 48 hour period, she once received 20 requests from owners to take their pets. As people return to their lives, work, and school, families have less time to take care of their pets. The best option to them seems to be to give their pets to shelters and rescue organizations so they might find another home that could better care for the pets, but shelters are running out of space.

Shelters already receive about 6.3 million pets a year. They are struggling to find homes for them all and with budget issues, leading shelters to end up euthanizing about 920,000 animals a year to make space for more animals. While this number has declined since it was about 2.6 million a year when the data was collected in 2011, 920,000 is still a very large number of animals. About 20% of dogs in shelters end up being euthanized, and 27% of cats in shelters are euthanized. In a recent post, Sweet Paws Rescue, a local rescue organization that has a policy of not euthanizing animals unless necessary for their medical situation, asks prospective pet owners to adopt, as they are currently dealing with an overload of rescue requests.

Now remember the 44% of American households that own pets? While shelters are overflowing with animals, 34% of dogs are purchased from breeders, and only 23% from shelters. While owning a pet seems like a wonderful idea, it is important to think about how much time and dedication you can give to caring for your pet, and how ethical the source you are looking at purchasing your pet from is. Would you rather buy a pet bred specifically to match your requirements, for the profit of the breeder and puppy mills themselves, or would you adopt one of the millions of animals looking for a home? Would you be willing to possibly save them from being euthanized, with profits going to the shelter, so it can continue to help other animals? While there are upsides to breeders, such as when a prospective pet owner is allergic to certain allergens found in certain dogs' fur, adopting from a shelter or rescue organization is overall the better choice.



Adopt a dog from your local
shelter today!
Source: www.sweetpawsrescue.org

Brooklyn NY Subway Shooting

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On Tuesday, April 12, 62-year-old Frank R. James opened fire in Brooklyn, NY on a subway, shooting 13 individuals while injuring 10 others. James was arrested 24 hours later after calling a police line and revealing his location in Manhattan. According to investigators, James, wearing a gas mask, threw two smoke canisters before shooting. The 13 wounded victims were hurt while fleeing the scene; the others were injured due to inhaling the canister's smoke, having a panic attack, or tripping in the chaos.

While his motive is currently unknown, authorities have declared that the shooting was planned and James intended to inflict damage upon the subway riders. On the day of the incident, several schools went on lockdown while the subway system shut down for hours. In response to the shooting, police involved in the investigation have decided to greatly increase the police presence stationed in the subway.

James now faces a charge of federal terrorism, with a possible punishment of life in prison if he's convicted.

This incident in Brooklyn brought up ongoing questions about gun control laws. The 2nd Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives citizens the right to "keep and bear arms." However, many people blame shooting incidents such as this on gun control laws that are too relaxed and loose. In this case, James was arrested nine times in New York between 1992 and 1998, in addition to three other arrests in New Jersey. James was never federally charged in these previous arrests (ranging from possession of weapons and charges of sex acts), therefore he could legally purchase a firearm.

This shooting provoked concern about increasing crime in New York's subway system and gun control regulations that are inflicting damage.

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