

Hamilton

[Religion](#), [God](#)



Hamilton begins by highlighting the common misunderstanding that mythology depicts the blissful state of man in his original harmony with nature. On the contrary, Hamilton notes, the lives of ancient people were not romantic and beautiful, but full of hardship, disease, and violence. For Hamilton, the Greek myths are remarkable in that they show how far the Greeks, an ancient civilization, had advanced beyond a primitive state of savagery and brutality. By the time Homer wrote his epic, the Iliad, a new way of looking at the world had come into being.

According to Hamilton, this new perspective is critically important, revealing a great deal not only about ancient Greece but about modern America as well” as so much of our own culture comes directly from the Greeks. One of the most important aspects of the Greek worldview was that it was the first to put humans at the center of the universe. Unlike the animal deities of the Egyptians and Mesopotamians, the gods of the Greeks are human in form. Not only do they possess human physical characteristics, but they embody the emotional flaws of humans as well.

Unlike the gods of other ancient civilizations, Greek gods are not infinitely omniscient and omnipotent, manifesting typical human foibles such as philandering, feasting and drinking, and obsessive jealousy. To the Greeks, the life of the gods so closely resembled human life that the gods felt real and tangible, rather than incomprehensible and remote. In this way, Hamilton argues, the myths of the Greeks reflect a view of the universe that acknowledges the mystery and beauty of humanity.

Even the most magical of Greek myths contain real-world elements: the supernatural Hercules lives in the very real city of Thebes, and the goddess Aphrodite is born in a spot any ancient tourist could visit, off the island of Cythera. In general, Greek myths involve less strange and frightening magic than the myths of other ancient civilizations. In this more rational world, individuals become heroes by virtue of bravery and strength rather than supernatural powers.

Hamilton contends that this revolutionary way of thinking about the world elevates humans and the worth of their abilities, making it a far less terrifying place in which to live. Hamilton points out a downside to this rational view of the supernatural: like humans, the gods are often unpredictable. They do not always operate on the highest moral grounds, and they get angry and jealous, sometimes doing terrible things like exacting vengeance or calling for sacrifices.

Even though Greek myth lacks wizards and demonic spellcasters, there are still plenty of horrible magic creatures: the snake-haired Gorgons, for instance, that appear to be relics of that older, primitive world. In the end, however, as Hamilton points out, the Greek hero always manages to defeat these creatures. Hamilton speaks of hardship, disease, and violence. For Hamilton, the Greek myths are remarkable in that they show how far the Greeks, an ancient civilization, had advanced beyond a jealousy.

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