

Folly of hubris in mythology

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



Elle Burbank Ms. Gilman En I Honors, period B November 4, 2011 The Folly of Hubris in Mythology In the book *Mythology*, by Edith Hamilton a common theme is the folly of hubris. The folly of hubris is when a mortal thinks they are just as good as, or better than, a deity. To prevent committing this unforgivable crime, the Greeks must be careful about what they say and do concerning the gods. The goddess, Minerva challenges a mortal named Arachne to a weaving contest, and Arachne accepts. Arachne does this because she thinks she is better than Minerva. Salmoneus, another mortal claims he is Zeus and wants to bring rain to the land. Phaethon, who is the son of the Sun-god, feels equal to him and wishes to drive the sun. These are prime examples of being guilty of hubris, and all these mortals are punished by losing their human lives. Committing hubris was the worst act one might commit in ancient Greece. The first way of committing the folly of hubris is comparing one's skills as equal to or greater than that of the gods. Arachne is a beautiful young maiden who made a mistake that ruins her life. Minerva, "was the weaver among the Olympians" (426). When Minerva hears that Arachne, a mortal, "declared her own work to be superior" (426), Minerva challenges her to a weaving competition. As wonderful works of threads are laying in a heap, it is obvious that Minerva has won. Minerva then tears the work of Arachne to shreds and beats the girl severely. Arachne, out of shame hanged herself. Minerva starts to feel bad for Arachne, so she sprinkles Arachne's body with magic and Arachne is changed into a spider. Because of Arachne's arrogance she brings the wrath of Minerva upon herself. If she had been humble and careful, she could have avoided the whole scenario and would have lived a longer life. Greeks knew not to compare their talents to

the gods, or they would somehow die. Comparing ones self to a deity is insane, but so is thinking you can perform the task of a god. The second way of committing the folly of hubris is by trying to do the tasks of the gods. Phaethon is a good example of this foolishness. Phaethon is the son of the sun-god, Helios. Phaethon went to confirm that Helios is his father and Helios tells him that he will give Phaethon one wish to prove it to him. Phaethon wishes to drive his chariot across the heavens for a day. Helios advises him against it. “ You are mortal and no mortal could drive my chariot. Indeed, no god except myself can do that” (182). As can be predicted, Phaethon failed, and the chariot goes out of control. He sets the earth on fire and wishes for death himself. Then, Jove's (lord of the sky) lightning struck Phaethon and he dies trying to do the task of the gods. A mortal thinking they can do the task of a god is hubris, but perhaps the worst hubris of all, was imitating a god. Lastly, one can commit the folly of hubris by actually imitating a god. Salmoneus may be the one who committed the greatest act of hubris. Salmoneus, trying to use weather-magic to bring a rainstorm to the town, pretends to be Zeus, at a festival to celebrate Zeus. Salmoneus makes a chariot with loud clanging brass when it moves. He drives it like a mad-man through town claiming to be Zeus and telling the people to worship him. “ But instantly there came a crash of actual thunder and a flash of lightning” (439). Salmoneus is struck dead by Zeus and falls from his chariot. Once again, the act of hubris ends in death. The folly of hubris is a dangerous crime for a Greek to commit. There are three ways the folly of hubris can be committed. One can think that their work is just as good or superior to that of a gods, like Arachne. Another way man can commit the folly of hubris is by

thinking they can do the task of a god. Phaethon was guilty of this. And perhaps the most ridiculous folly of hubris was imitating a god like Salmoneus did. Edith Hamilton's book *Mythology* shows the importance of not committing the folly of hubris and how bad the consequence will be if man is stupid enough to commit this crime. The folly of hubris is the most important themes in Greek mythology.