

The roles of the gods in greek myth

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The Roles of the Gods in Greek Myth In Greek myth, there are many deities who specialize in different realms. According to Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* and Homer's *Iliad*, Greek gods do not only have power, but also have interactions with humans. Most of Greek deities make themselves or their intent known to humans through direct communication and indirect punishment. Zeus punishes Prometheus, the creator and protector of the mortals, for stealing fire from the gods and giving it to the human beings. Zeus, the king of the Gods, rules the world by his own laws. Although Prometheus is one of the most intelligent Titans and takes Zeus's side in the Titanomachy, he cannot avoid being punished for the violation of Zeus's will. After Zeus wins the war against the Titans, he plans to destroy humans completely and create another race (Aesch. *Pro.* 229-237). Since Prometheus opposes Zeus and shows excessive stubbornness and pride, Zeus demands that his servants, Strength and Violence, chain Prometheus to a mountain to show his power. Gods also communicate with human beings. For example, in *Iliad*, Athena comes down and tries to make peace between Agamemnon and Achilles. During the war between the Achaeans and Trojans, Achilles, one of the Achaean's most important warriors, is angry with the commander Agamemnon for taking away his reward, Briseis, and stops fighting for the Achaeans. Athena hates the Trojans, so she talks with Achilles to convince him to stop fighting with Agamemnon and join the battle (Hom. *Il.* 1. 241-251). In addition, Athena gives the Achaean hero Diomedes incredible strength and the ability to see the gods so that Diomedes can be more powerful in the war (Hom. *Il.* 5. 1-3). She also encourages Diomedes and warns him not to challenge the gods except Aphrodite (Hom. *Il.* 5. 136-137).

Although the Greek gods communicate with humans and help them in some ways, they are actually not morally upright. Most of time, they make decisions based on their own interests. Almost all the Greek gods are involved in the outcome of Trojan War, which was originated from a quarrel between the goddesses Athena, Hera and Aphrodite. Zeus promises to help the Trojans not out of any profound moral consideration but rather because he owes Achilles's mother Thetis a favor (Hom. Il. 1. 600-609). Hera and Athena passionately hate the Trojans, so they work together to help the Achaeans recover from their retreat. Hera even seduces Zeus so that she can help the Achaeans behind his back (Hom. Il. 14. 283-289). In addition, the River Xanthus is very angry when Achilles kills so many Trojans, whose corpses are choking him. But in the fight between Xanthus and Achilles, Poseidon, the god of sea, comes to help Achilles because he holds a grudge against the Trojans, who never paid him back for helping them build their city. Because of the Greek gods' involvement in the Trojan War, it becomes quite chaotic. None of them are impartial or fair to both sides of the war. They are very emotional and always try to fight against the people they hate. The same type of behavior occurs in Prometheus Bound. Zeus has no pity or concern for others. He sent eagles to attack Prometheus repeatedly (Aesch. Pro. 1022-1025). Still, he decides to free Prometheus finally because Prometheus agrees to offer him an oracle. Therefore, the Greek gods are selfish and do not obey a moral code at all. Zeus is not morally upright; however, as the king of the Olympian gods, he plays an important role in both divine and human interactions. The main theme of Homer's Iliad is the wrath of Achilles. Though Achilles refuses to fight against the Trojans

because of Agamemnon's disrespect, he returns to the battle finally. This largely depends on Zeus, who is one of the moderators in this story. He agrees to punish the Achaeans when Achilles's mother Thetis asks him to do so, which abates Achilles's rage. In most parts of the story, Zeus stays impartial and keeps other gods from intervening in the war. In addition, Zeus, as the symbol of authority and justice, never comes down onto the battlefield to interfere with the mortal conflicts, in contrast to the rest of the gods who fight for what they favor. For instance, Apollo and Artemis, who support the Trojans in the war, often give aid to the city of Troy. Zeus acts as a balance through the entire war. Since he is subordinate to Fates, he keeps the gods in order and prevents them from violating the Fates. Zeus allows some gods to go to the battlefield after Apollo joins the battle because he doesn't want the Achaeans to win earlier than they are supposed to. Throughout the Trojan War, Zeus is the director who keeps the war move along the right track. He mostly remains neutral and plays a vital role in the divine and human interactions. The divine interactions between Zeus and other gods are related to human affairs. These connections can be found in the relationship between king and subjects, male and female. All the Greek deities need to obey Zeus's rules because he is the king of the gods, a powerful tyrant. However, Prometheus is an exception. He gives fire to mankind and is so stubborn that he refuses to make peace with Zeus (Aesch. Pro. 167-175). As a result, he is chained to a mountain, where other gods can see how humiliating he is. Agamemnon, the leader of the Achaean army is also selfish and arrogant, which is the same as Zeus. When one of his valuable warriors Achilles challenges his leadership, Agamemnon is so angry

that he takes away Achilles's reward (Hom. Il. 1. 378-382). So it is obvious that no matter in the Greek mythology or real world, the king always is endowed with power that he can control his territory and get whatever he wants. But there is a little different in the standing of male and female. Unlike ordinary women, the Greek female deities do have some power; for instance, Hera is the goddess of marriage and women fertility; Aphrodite is the goddess of sexual attraction. While in mankind, Homer describes women as useless containers. Since they only consume food and do not produce, they are inferior and not able to speak their wills or make any decisions. In Iliad, Chryseis and Briseis, a pair of beautiful maidens is honored to Agamemnon and Achilles separately. When Chryseis's father tries his best to get his daughter back, Agamemnon replaces Chryseis with Achilles's lover Briseis. Chryseis and Briseis are treated as objects. Homer does not mention any of their words in the book because no one cares how they actually feel except their parents. Overall, the similarities between divine interactions and human affairs are that the kings are always powerful and the female is subservient to the male. Though Iliad is a story about ancient heroes, gods and goddesses, it does reflect the values and conditions of Greek society at that time. Iliad was written around eighth century BC, the Archaic Period in Greek history. The main transition is the rise of polis and colonization in Greek society. In the book, all the gods are led by Zeus and obey his rules, which reflects that each polis has its own ruler who is not morally upright and tends to set up dictatorships, raise armies and attack other polities to expand his influence. Additionally, the human relationships are not well if we consider the relationship between Zeus and Hera. In the Trojan

War, Hera absolutely backs up the Achaeans. So when Thetis asks Zeus to help the Trojans, he is hesitated; however, he finally agrees because he owes her (Hom. Il. 1. 619-635). Hera hears that and asks Zeus what's his plan, but Zeus replies that she will be the first to know whatever is right for her (Hom. Il. 1. 644-660). So Hera is very angry and decides to seduce Zeus in order to help the Achaeans behind his back. From the myth, we can find that there is hardly any trust or promise between husband and wife. So it's possible that husband and wife in real Greek family may cheat each other for different reasons. Furthermore, Zeus promises Thetis that he will give Achilles more glories, which reflects that honor can be one of the most important subjects during that time. People want glory so that they can be powerful in the society. In conclusion, the Greek gods always have power in different areas, but they still are not as powerful as Zeus who rules the world. They use different ways to show their power to the human beings, such as communication and punishment. However, these Greek gods including Zeus are not morally upright. They act on their own selfish purposes and sometimes cheat each other to get what they want. As the king of the gods, Zeus is crucial in the human and divine interactions. He can control the war and make those who challenge his authority like Prometheus to suffer. The depiction of the gods and divine interactions actually provides a realistic view of human conditions. The rise of polis and colonization are the important themes in the Archaic Period. The king of the polis always has strong power and makes decisions based on his will. The warriors and leaders are usually male because women are considered to be useless and inferior, which is a little contrast to the Greek myth.