

**PHI 335.1**  
Tuesday-Thursday.  
9:35-11:00

## **The Ethics and Aesthetics of Myth**

Spring 2011  
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### **Course Objectives**

- to become familiar with some of the archetypal myths from human history throughout the world
- to explore the theories that attempt to explain the mythic impulse
- to reflect, question, and dialogue on a range of philosophical outlooks regarding the nature of myth in history and in our society today
- To explore the meaning of myth in our lives through readings, classroom discussion and writing
- to continue your development of critical thinking, discussion and writing skills



**What are your own personal goals for this course? You will be invited to write a short essay reflecting on your own learning plan for our course due on the second class.**

### **Catalogue Course Description**

Plato claimed that myth and philosophy are closely related and many 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals such as Levi-Strauss, Freud and Joseph

Campbell have likewise argued for the importance of a mythological epistemology. This course will explore the aesthetic and ethical implications of a range of myths from European traditions as diverse as the Greek and Roman myths, the Icelandic sagas and some of the early mediaeval poetic lays. We will extend our study into the myths of non-Western cultures as we seek to investigate how mythic thinking informs our broader understanding of truth, beauty and goodness.

### **Expanded Description**

What do myths mean to the people that create them? From where do they come in the human psyche? Are myths pre-philosophy, pre-science or a form of knowing of their own? Are there common themes, ideas, stories in the myths from around the world? This course will explore the nature of myth by reading many myths from a range of cultures, including our own Western culture. We will investigate what myths do in the society from which they originate and hopefully, in doing this, we will better understand the dual impulse in human beings to ask philosophical questions and offer narratives to illuminate the world. Here are some opening questions to consider:

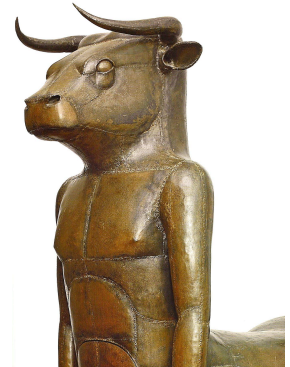
- What myths appear again and again?
- How does beauty manifest itself in mythic stories?
- Are fairy tales myths disguised as children's stories?

- How are good and evil depicted and what does that reveal about our ethical ideals?
- How do myths explain the other, the outsider?
- Are myths false?
- What is the relationship between myth and religion?
- Do we discard stories when we grow up? Dismiss myths when we know “know better?”

### What question would you add?

#### My role:

- To guide us through the theories behind the many philosophical interpretations of and answers to our questions. I can hopefully provide the “background story” for the readings.
- To challenge each of you to engage in our topic from whatever perspective you choose and help you find merit in our collective adventure
- To support you in your own learning program



#### Your role

- To be curious, endeavor to complete the readings, share your ideas with the rest of the class in our class sessions
- To ask for clarification, explanation or further evidence when presented with a problematic point
- To support one another in your on-going endeavors to become thoughtful and reflective human beings, even as you prepare for a range of different career tracks.
- To take another look at myth and reflect upon its role in human experience in today’s world, informed by the ideas that we will read, discuss and create in our classroom community.

#### Course assignments and grading—adds up to 100%

20%	Final exam
20%	Attendance and participation; a large portion of the final grade will be determined by your coming to class prepared and your willingness to enter into discussion on our readings
20%	periodic exams, about three (cannot be made up)
10%	quizzes on the readings throughout the semester
30%	two essays (see information later in syllabus)
100%	

#### Spring 2011 Required Texts:

Leonard, Scott and McClure, Michael. **Myth and Knowing**, McGraw Hill. Isbn: 978 0 7674 1957 X

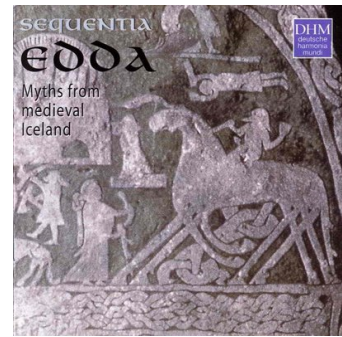
Levi-Stauss, Claude. **Myth and Meaning**.

Armstrong, Karen. **A short history of myth**. Canongate, 2005. Isbn: 978-1-84195-800-2 (I did not order this at the bookstore as it is a late add but it is easily available in local bookstores and in our library.)

**Electronic reserve Sign on code is S1259**

## PHI335--Syllabus\*\*

- 1/20 Introduction—what myths do we know?
- 1/25-1/27 What makes a myth a myth?  
Dorty and Baeten essays from electronic reserve
- 2/1-3-  
2/8-10 Myth and Philosophy: a problematic marriage  
M&K, chapter 1
- 2/15-17 Creation Myths  
2/24 M&K, chapter 2
- 2/22 Study Day or Snow Day?—possibly no classes
- 3/1-3 Female/Male divine  
3/8-10 M&K, chapter 3 and 4
- 3/15-17 Spring Break**
- 3/22-24-29 Sacred Places  
M&K, chapter 6
- 3/31-4/5-4/7 re-thinking what myths *mean*  
Levi-Strauss, **Myth and Meaning**
- 4/12-14-19 Tracing myth through history: big ideas  
Armstrong, **A Short History of Myth**
- 4/21 Maundy Thursday- no classes
- 4/26-28 Telling our stories  
Class sharing
- 5/3 catch up, review
- 5/12 **Final Exam**



**\*\*This schedule is tentative; we will follow at our own pace.**

## Myths to choose for your second essay:

**Hesiod's Theogony:** <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/theogony.htm>

See Hackett edition: **Works and Days and the Theogony**, 0-87220-179-1  
978-0-87220-179-8

**Ovid's Metamorphoses:** various translations

<http://classics.mit.edu/Ovid/metam.html>

<http://etext.virginia.edu/latin/ovid/trans/Ovhome.htm>

The edition translated by Ted Hughes is particularly wonderful a selection.

**Ovid- Metamorphoses**, Farrar, Staus and Giroux, 978-0374228415

**Chretien De Troyes' Percival:** <http://www.mcelhearn.com/perceval.html>

**Poetic Eddas:** [http://www.sunnyway.com/runes/poetic\\_edda.html](http://www.sunnyway.com/runes/poetic_edda.html)

Translated by Carolyne Larrington, Oxford University Press, 1996.

**Bhagavad Gita:** <http://www.bhagavad-gita.org/index-english.html>

Translated by Stephen Mitchell, Three Rivers Press, 2000.

**Gilgamesh:** <http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/mesopotamian/gilgamesh/>

Translated by Stephen Mitchell. Free Press, 2004.

**Beauty and the Beast:** <http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/beautybeast/index.html>

See the versions by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve and Jeanne Marie Le Prince de Beaumont. I highly recommend the Jean Cocteau movie

**The Mabinogion**, a Welsh myth/romance

Everyman Library has a reasonable edition with a preface by John Updike

You may explore other options but submit them to me before beginning your project. There are some fascinating accounts of Native American and African myths.

## Background on mythology:

Mary Magoulik: <http://www.faculty.de.gcsu.edu/~mmagouli/defmyth.htm>

Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mythography#Myth\\_theories](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mythography#Myth_theories)

An excellent source on myths from many different cultures and times:

<http://www.chlive.org/pbeck/eastlibrary/MYTHOLOGY.htm>

- *Man* New Series, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Sep., 1969), pp. 337-353 (article consists of 17 pages)
- Published by: [Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2798111)  
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2798111>

**Office hours:** Monday through Thursday, 8-9:30 and by appointment. You may also contact me through e-mail: [wturgeon@sjcny.edu](mailto:wturgeon@sjcny.edu)



Here is a great website dedicated to offering some guidelines on writing a philosophical paper: <http://www.princeton.edu/~jimpryor/general/writing.html>



### Essays for PHI 335

As part of your course requirements, you will need to write *two essays*, one an explication and commentary on a chapter in the Armstrong book on myth and the other on a myth of our choice. Each essay should be 5-7 pages in length, typewritten, 1.5 spacing, 12 font.

#### Essay I—Theorizing about myth 15%

Chose one chapter from this text and write a summary of how myth functions, according to Armstrong, in that period. What myths does she discuss? From what cultures are they? Choose one of them to investigation and report in your paper a more extended version of the myth. **Due date: February 24<sup>th</sup>**

#### Essay II—Mining a myth for meaning 15%

Each of you will choose a particular myth with which to “live” this semester. You will read it again and again and write your second essay on the story of the myth, offering commentary as to what you think it means. In your essay you should bring in some of the theoretical tools that we will acquire through our collective study. At the end of the semester, each student will offer a presentation on his or her myth of choice.

**Due date: April 26<sup>nd</sup>**

**Essays received after these dates will be accepted but penalized a grade for each day late.**

### Some General Points to Note

The Dean has asked that I alert you to some general rules and points of clarification:

1. In composing essays and papers, please be scrupulous in format and authenticity. Copying texts (written and web sites) without citation is plagiarism and will not be tolerated. Any such work will be rejected and the grade of “F” will be recorded. If you are uncertain about how to use other sources, please consult me. I will review the details. Consult the College Catalogue for further details about the ramifications of plagiarism.
2. If you have a documented disability which may impact your learning, please contact the Office of Counseling and Career Services to see if accommodations are necessary and appropriate. This information will be kept confidential.
3. It is prudent to make copies of papers that you submit in case they do not reach me. I haven’t lost a paper yet but in rare cases they have disappeared from mailboxes, etc. I reserve the right to request an electronic version of your paper if need be. In general I recommend saving your school work on your computer or a disk or simply make photocopies. This can be a life-saver!

Further notes from me:

I care deeply about integrity, my own and yours. I ask that you observe our college policy of honesty and dedication to our core values. Cheating and plagiarism are not victimless crimes; they are serious infractions against one another as members of a community dedicated to learning and caring for one another.

### **Thinking about Grades—a necessary evil in a quantitative world!**

I find that students are often confused by what grades mean and in our culture too often we make two mistakes:

1. We consider anything less than a “A” as a sign of failure
2. We confuse effort, intent and interest with achievement.

To help address these confusions I include here the description of the SJC grading system from our catalogue.

#### **From the Arts & Sciences Undergraduate Catalogue:**

##### **Grades are interpreted as follows:**

Quality Grade	Percentage	Quality Points
Excellent	A 93.0 - 100.00	4.0
	A- 90.0 - 92.9	3.7
Good	B+ 87.0 - 89.9	3.3
	B 83.0 - 86.9	3.0
	B- 80.0 - 82.9	2.7
Satisfactory	C+ 77.0 - 79.9	2.3
	C 73.0 - 76.9	2.0
Passing	C- 70.0 - 72.9	1.7
	D+ 67.0 - 69.9	1.3
	D 63.0 - 66.9	1.0
	D- 60.0 - 62.9	0.7
Unsatisfactory	F Below 60.0	0.0

**Excellent**= outstanding mastery of the materials and performance on all assessment projects accompanied by active, ongoing and sustained participation through questions, comments and support of others within the learning community. A grade in the excellent range indicates that the student not only completed every aspect of the course requirements but went above and beyond in terms of engagement through readings, discussions and exams.

**Good**= A superior grasp of the material, clearly above average performance on assessment projects and active involvement in class. A clear indication of hard work, talent and philosophical curiosity

**Satisfactory**= acceptable performance in class and on assessment projects. Completion of all work assigned with evidence of basic competency; this is a completely respectable grade, especially if you are not choosing to minor in philosophy

**Passing**= enough work and quality was provided to pass the course but in most cases there were learning problems, such as with attendance and subsequently comprehension, lack of or minimal participation, checkered pattern of readings, failure to study for quizzes and exams, need for serious work on writing and thinking skills, failure to complete assignments..

I realize that philosophy may not be your major here at SJC but I will try to weave points of connection to any and all disciplines and invite you to challenge me to help you make those connections vibrant and interesting. However, your grade is in your own hands. I respect that this course may not win the majority of your attention based on other responsibilities and I acknowledge that each student can choose for him or her self how much effort and time they can devote to any one class. Give yourself permission to determine to what extent you can dedicate yourself to this class, and indeed each of your classes. Do not be hard on yourself but at the same time, take advantage of what the class can offer you in terms of knowledge, skills and opportunities to explore a new area of human experience and reflection.

I begin the semester inviting everyone to give it their all and live up to one's own high standards as a point of personal pride and ownership of your own education. Keep me informed if you encounter problems that interfere with your performing up to your own chosen level. I am always available for assistance. If you would prefer to work with fellow students, let me know and we can structure some study groups. There is absolutely no one at St. Joseph's College who cannot pass this course if they choose to do so. But at the same time, I respect that this is one course of many that you may be taking and that you must balance your many obligations, as you deem best. Please call on me to help you design your own learning goals and plan for this course so that you can be successful.

--Dr. Wendy C. Turgeon