

# **King Minos: The Father of Heavenly Law**

AGRS 28 Term Paper

Yutong Du

GSI: Rebekah McKay, Fridays 1-2pm

# Submission Details

Grade: 10 / 10

## Term Paper Topics

Yutong Du submitted Feb 23 at 11:09pm

Re-submit Assignment

Paper View

I'd like to do prompt 1, and specifically look at the character of Minos. Specifically, I'm interested in the role of Minos in modern works such as Dante's *Inferno*, and others.

great

Rebekah Mckay , Feb 27 at 1:39pm

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One of the most important figures in mythology in regards to order within society is King Minos, son of Zeus and Europa. In mythology, he is most well known for being the king of Knossos, a city located on the island of Crete, and is also well known for his conversations with Zeus to bring laws to the land below. While references of Minos in mythology are really limited to only a few select myths, his legacy as a lawmaker and the myths he's a part of have had a lasting impact on several significant works in contemporary literature.

Within mythology, perhaps *the* most famous myth in which Minos appears is that of Theseus and the Minotaur. As the myth goes, Theseus grows up in Troezen and arrives in Athens, where he learns of the punishment given to the Athenians – every year, the city must surrender fourteen children (seven boys and seven girls) to face the minotaur, a half-human, half-bull that resides within the Labyrinth built by Daedalus. This minotaur is intimately connected to Minos, as it is the product of the divine punishment Poseidon exacted upon the king, for not sacrificing the snow-white bull to him. Specifically, he had Minos's wife Pasiphaë fall in love with the bull, thus giving birth to the Minotaur. Minos then had Daedalus construct a labyrinth to entrap the bull, and later when Minos defeated Athens in conflict, began the demanding for sacrifices to the bull.

Upon learning of these sacrifices, Theseus volunteers as one of them, and travels to Knossos to face the minotaur himself. Once there, he was "well received by King Minos" (Seltman 1953, 2), and Minos's daughter, Ariadne also falls in love with Theseus. Knowing that he is about to be sent into the labyrinth, Ariadne gives Theseus a ball of thread, allowing him to retrace his path to the entrance after slaying the minotaur. Theseus does just that, and subsequently elopes with Ariadne, and this is where the relevance to Minos ends.

In terms of the plot, Minos really only serves as a catalyst and one of many adversaries Theseus ends up journeying on in order to become recognized as a staple hero in mythology. This is

significant, since it highlights that in the grand scheme of things, Minos's role in this story is relatively minor – Theseus's journey continues without the mention of Minos, highlighting his role as a one-time hurdle and nothing more.

Alongside this myth with the minotaur, Minos also appears in the *Odyssey*, where he is said to have “conversed with great Zeus” every nine years, and it is from these conversations that he “brought back laws fore the cities” (Levaniouk 2011, Chapter 5). This passage is significant, because it succinctly summarizes why we associate Minos so heavily with divine law in modern (i.e. anything preceding the Greek and Roman era) times. The nature of these conversations being implied to be the source for the laws of the land highlights not only Minos's connection to divine law, but it also accentuates Minos's importance as a figure in Greek mythology, as this responsibility of passing down the law of the gods demonstrates that he is far from any ordinary king.

In terms of roles in major myths, as far as I can tell, this is where the road ends. However, despite this relatively limited scope, Minos's legacy has made him almost synonymous with divine law in many works that later incorporate the character. One such case of this is in one of Plato's dialogues, titled *Minos*. Firstly, it's obvious that this work is related to king Minos in some way; after all, the entire dialogue is effectively named after him, so already this highlights his importance as a mythological character as he's important enough that Plato has dedicated an entire dialogue to him. More importantly, however, are the contents of this work. The dialogue revolves around Socrates and an unnamed companion debating about law itself, opening with the question of “what is law?”, and exploring the “limits of law” itself (Lutz 2010, 992). Throughout the second half of the dialogue, Socrates propels the idea of Minos being a symbol of divine justice, by explaining how Minos learned “whole kingly art” from his conversations with Zeus,

then proceeded to “use this art [to] make divine laws that teach virtue and bring happiness.” (Lutz 2010, 998). To start, the characterization of the laws as a “whole kingly art” highlights the immense value Socrates, and therefore Plato holds to the laws Minos passes down, and furthers the synonymity between Minos and the notion of divine law. Further, Socrates also explicitly points to Minos’s conversations with Zeus as the “evidence for the divinity of Minos and his laws,” claiming that Minos was “the king of Knossos and the confidant of great Zeus” (Lutz 2010, 999). This explicit connection Socrates draws by labelling Minos as Zeus’s “confidant” indicates to the reader that Minos’s status is nearly equal to that of a god, and given this elevated status, further solidifies the notion that the laws he passes down are divine, and are hence of the utmost importance.

In addition to placing Minos on this divine pedestal, Socrates also uses the example of Minos to highlight the philosophical dilemma surrounding the creation of law itself. For instance, aside from defining what law is, one of the other central questions *Minos* asks surrounds the creation of law itself – specifically, whether an “ideal legislator” exists (Mulroy 2007, 122). Within the dialogue, Socrates uses Minos as an example of divine law passed down from the gods, and contrasts this with the example of Hipparchus, who “seeks wisdom from his own invention and readings” (Mulroy 2007, 122). This contrast is then used to ask the question of “whether god or some man deserves credit for [the creation and dissemination of] laws.” (Mulroy 2007, 122). At the end of it all, both Socrates and the companion agree that neither of them can reasonably be deemed the ideal legislator. (Mulroy 2007, 122) The use of Minos within this dialogue exemplifies perfectly the way Minos is portrayed in contemporary works, as he is being used here as a prime example of divine law. Further, the deep philosophical question that’s being asked as a result of this contrast also serves to highlight the importance of Minos in modern society, as the question

of legal authorship and the limitations explored in this work remain central to legal philosophy today.

Furthermore, another incredibly famous work that Minos appears in is Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia* (Divine Comedy). Within the comedy, it is well known that Dante doesn't shy away from incorporating historical Greek and Roman figures into his work. For instance, the most obvious example of this is Virgil, who serves as Dante's guide through *Inferno*, describing the souls trapped within each circle of Hell, and overall serves as the symbol of wisdom throughout the entire journey. Here, we encounter Minos as Dante and Virgil descend past the circle of limbo, and is described to "judge each sinner [...] and sentences [them] by [...] wind[ing] his tail around himself as many times as the number of the circle that he assigns" (*Inferno* V, 6-12). Dante also calls Minos a "connoisseur of sin" (*Inferno* V, 9) to further expand on Minos's role as a judge of the underworld. Here, the portrayal of Minos is actually incredibly complex: on one hand, Dante also furthers the repeating theme of Minos's association with divine law by giving him the power to decide the appropriate punishment for sinners who confess before him. Yet, at the same time, Dante places Minos in hell along with all the other damned souls, which almost serves to highlight that despite Minos's unshakable connections with divine law and what is considered "morally good", Dante nevertheless decides that Minos himself has sinned enough that he too deserves to be placed in hell. This is significant because this highlights a nuanced perspective that is not seen in Plato's *Minos*: Plato chooses to discuss Minos in what can be considered to be unilaterally a positive light, Dante chooses to also highlight that despite Minos's divinity, he has nonetheless also sinned enough that he is punished within hell just like everybody else. While I can't specifically point to what actions prompted Dante to portray Minos this way, one instance that would provide a strong argument for placing Minos in hell would be the suffering he has

caused on the Athenian people by demanding for human sacrifices in the minotaur myth.

## References

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Term Paper Peer Review Worksheet  
AGRS 28 | GSI: Rebekah McKay

Reviewer's name: Clara Doll

Writer's name: Yutong Du

**Directions:** Please exchange your term paper drafts with your partner and complete Part A of this handout. After you have each completed Part A, swap handouts and discuss the questions/answers. When you have finished discussing Part A with your partner, please complete Part B on your own.

**Part A:**

1. Restate your partner's thesis in your own words. This does not need to be limited to one sentence.

While in mythology, Minos is often depicted as an adversary to (good?) he is actually a symbol of justice that is central to modern legal philosophy.

2. Is the claim made in your partner's thesis debatable (i.e., something a reasonable person could disagree with)?

☒ Yes

☐ No

3. Is the thesis specific?

☒ Yes

☐ No

4. Based on both the introduction and the outline, does this proposed paper respond all aspects of the essay prompt?

☐ Yes

☒ No

- a. If no, what portions of the prompt are left out?

I like your thesis, but I feel like it could be a bit more direct and with a bit more context.

5. Does the introduction make the stakes of the argument clear? Or, phrased another way, does this thesis pass the "so what" test?

☐ Yes

☒ No



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6. Does your partner's introduction explain to the reader what they can expect from the remainder of the paper? Look through their body paragraphs and identify material that might be foreshadowed in their introductory paragraph:

yes; it's suggested the essay will explore Minoan legacy and impact on the modern legal system.

7. Look at the overall structure of your partner's essay. What could they rearrange or add to help make their essay stronger and more cogent?

I feel like there's not a super clear line of reasoning, but that may be in part because of the thesis. New points are introduced throughout that don't show an obvious correlation with the main thesis.

8. Consider the three tenets of a persuasive essay: 1) argument, 2) evidence & analysis, and 3) organization. Are there any areas that your partner would benefit from focusing on as they edit their essay? Look at the works cited. Does the essay cite the required number of sources? If not, which types of sources are missing?

1) argument could be a little clearer  
2) lots of good evidence and analysis! some of it could be omitted  
3) ~~as~~ could be a little more organized

9. Do you have any other suggestions of ways to improve this paper (e.g., other types of evidence to consider)?

I love the idea and I think the evidence and analysis is great! I think revising the thesis and establishing a clearer line of reasoning would be good, and I'm just a little confused about some of the points (potentially better wording and omission of unnecessary evidence?)



## Term Paper Peer Review Worksheet

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**Part B:** When you are done discussing Part A, please complete the questions below *for your own paper*.

1. Did your reviewer's restatement of your thesis align with what you intend to argue? If not, how can you edit your introduction make your thesis clearer?

~~It doesn't~~ It aligned fairly well, though I should have been more clear to highlight the differences between *Mythos* in myth and contemporary examples.

2. List the comments from your reader will be most helpful in developing your paper further.

The comments about the clarity ~~and~~, providing context and proper reasoning for my arguments helped a lot. (specifically the context part.)

3. Are there any comments you disagree with? If so, why?

There aren't any I outright disagree with, everything said was quite reasonable.

4. Speaking of your thesis statement, you should always try to debunk your thesis by identifying counterevidence. Identify some counterevidence below:

I haven't yet had the chance to investigate *Phaedrus's* involvement in the other, lesser known myths (that of *Dionysos* and *Phaedrus*, for example). Perhaps his role in those myths play a large role in mythology.

There are also many other examples of divine laws, divine intervention that do not involve *Phaedrus*, so there is a solid argument against *Phaedrus* being the father of divine law as you could argue his role is less significant than some other figure.