

Cultivating Critical Thinking: The Pedagogical Role of Ancient Greek Religion in Today's Education

Antonia I. Kapeleri 

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the pedagogical value of teaching ancient Greek religion as a means to cultivate critical thinking in today's educational context. While often viewed as a historical curiosity or mythological study, ancient Greek religion offers rich opportunities for students to engage with complex narratives, ethical dilemmas, and philosophical inquiries. By analyzing myths, grappling with moral questions, and exploring the intersection of religion and philosophy, students develop essential critical thinking skills such as analysis, interpretation, and ethical reasoning. Additionally, comparative analysis of Greek religious beliefs with those of other cultures broadens students' perspectives, encouraging them to consider the influence of cultural and historical contexts on religious thought. Ultimately, this paper argues that integrating ancient Greek religion into modern curricula not only enriches students' understanding of the past but also equips them with the critical thinking abilities necessary for navigating the complexities of the contemporary world.

Keywords: Ancient Greek religion, critical thinking, mythology, pedagogy.

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PhD, High School Philologist; Former Senior Researcher, The Foundation of the Hellenic World, Greece.

*Corresponding Author:
e-mail: antonia.kapeleri.81@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly complex and interconnected world, critical thinking is a vital skill for students to develop. Educators continually seek effective methods to cultivate this ability in their students. One underappreciated yet potent resource for fostering critical thinking is the study of ancient Greek religion. While often relegated to the domain of history or mythology, ancient Greek religion offers rich opportunities for students to engage with complex narratives, moral dilemmas, and philosophical inquiries. This paper argues that teaching ancient Greek religion can play a crucial role in cultivating critical thinking by encouraging students to analyze, interpret, and evaluate the beliefs, myths, and cultural practices of an influential civilization.

2. THE NATURE OF CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking is not just a skill but a mindset that encourages students to approach problems with curiosity and skepticism. It involves questioning assumptions, exploring alternative solutions, and making decisions

based on careful reasoning rather than impulsive judgments (Dilekçi & Karatay, 2023; Gafour & Gafour, 2020). In today's rapidly changing world, where misinformation and complex societal challenges abound, the ability to think critically is more crucial than ever for at least five reasons:

- 1) **Misinformation and Disinformation:** The internet and social media have made it easier for misinformation and disinformation to spread quickly and widely. Fake news, conspiracy theories, and biased reporting can easily mislead individuals. Critical thinking skills enable people to assess the credibility of sources, differentiate between facts and opinions, and recognize biased or manipulative content. In a media-saturated environment, critical thinking is essential for media literacy. Individuals need to analyze and evaluate the vast amount of information they encounter daily to make informed decisions and avoid being swayed by false narratives (Benjamin & McLean, 2022; Joshi *et al.*, 2022; Lee, 2022).
- 2) **Complex Societal Challenges:** Modern society faces a range of complex challenges, from climate change



and public health crises to social justice issues and technological advancements. These problems often have no simple solutions and require the ability to analyze multiple perspectives, consider long-term consequences, and make reasoned judgments. Addressing these challenges often requires interdisciplinary approaches that combine knowledge from various fields. Critical thinking allows individuals to integrate different types of information, weigh the trade-offs, and develop innovative solutions (Bailin, 1987; Brazdauskas, 2015; Ferrarello *et al.*, 2021; Tobón & Luna-Nemecio, 2021).

- 3) **Rapid Technological Change:** The pace of technological change is accelerating, with new tools and platforms constantly emerging. Critical thinking helps individuals adapt to these changes by enabling them to learn new skills, evaluate the ethical implications of technology, and anticipate potential future impacts. As technology evolves, so do concerns about digital privacy and security. Critical thinkers are better equipped to understand these issues, make informed decisions about their digital footprints, and protect themselves from cyber threats (Ainslie *et al.*, 2023; Gibson, 2015; Lin & Wu, 2016; Strom & Strom, 2002; Yilmaz, 2021).
- 4) **Democratic Participation:** In a democratic society, citizens are expected to participate in decision-making processes, whether through voting, public debate, or community involvement. Critical thinking is essential for making informed choices, understanding the implications of policies, and engaging in constructive dialogue with others. Today's political landscape is increasingly polarized, with extreme viewpoints often dominating discourse. Critical thinking encourages open-mindedness and the ability to consider alternative perspectives, which is crucial for finding common ground and fostering civil discourse (Browne, 2014; Dixon, 2018; Ekström & Östman, 2015; Faraon, 2018; Magioglou, 2008; Rosenberg, 2007).
- 5) **Workplace and Career Demands:** Employers increasingly value critical thinking as a key competency in the workplace. Employees who can analyze problems, generate solutions, and make decisions based on evidence are more likely to succeed in dynamic work environments. In a world where job roles and industries are constantly evolving, critical thinking supports lifelong learning. It enables individuals to continuously adapt, acquire new knowledge, and stay relevant in their careers (Basadur *et al.*, 2014; Claxton & Lucas, 2007; Sacramento *et al.*, 2013; Schieman & Young, 2010; Tripathy, 2018).

Educators play a pivotal role in fostering critical thinking. Designing curricula that incorporate problem-solving activities, debates, case studies, and opportunities for reflective thinking can help students develop these skills. Integrating diverse perspectives into the curriculum also encourages students to appreciate the complexity and resist the oversimplification of issues (Afzal *et al.*, 2023; Jofili,

1996; Mastul, 2024; Nykyporets *et al.*, 2023; Pithers & Soden, 2000).

Critical thinking extends beyond academic achievement. In everyday life, it enables individuals to make informed decisions, understand different viewpoints, and contribute thoughtfully to society. Whether navigating media literacy, making ethical choices, or engaging in democratic processes, critical thinking equips students to handle the demands of the modern world with confidence and discernment.

This approach underscores the necessity of embedding critical thinking throughout educational experiences, ensuring that students are not only knowledgeable but also capable of applying their knowledge in thoughtful, reflective ways.

3. ANCIENT GREEK RELIGION: A RICH PEDAGOGICAL RESOURCE

Ancient Greek religion, often perceived merely as a collection of myths and rituals, is, in fact, a profoundly intricate system of beliefs that deeply influenced every aspect of ancient Greek society. This religious framework is not only a reflection of the ancient Greeks' spiritual practices but also an embodiment of their cultural values, social structures, and philosophical inquiries. Understanding ancient Greek religion requires an appreciation of its multifaceted nature, where myth, ritual, and philosophy intersect to address fundamental human concerns (Brandon, 2024; Eidinow, 2011; Kindt, 2012; Rask, 2023).

The myths of ancient Greece are far more than entertaining stories; they are dense with symbolic meaning and philosophical depth. Each myth serves as a lens through which we can examine the values, fears, and aspirations of the society that created them. For instance, the myth of Prometheus, who defied Zeus to bring fire to humanity, speaks to themes of rebellion, the pursuit of knowledge, and the consequences of challenging authority (Blanariu, 2017; Dougherty, 2006; Stroumsa, 1987; Trousson, 2015). Similarly, the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice explores the profound power of love and the inevitability of death, themes that resonate across cultures and eras. These myths often grapple with universal human concerns that remain relevant today. Justice, power, love, fate, and the nature of the divine are central themes in many Greek myths (Bowra, 1952; Hardman, 1990; Lee, 1960; Meintjes, 2022; Murdoch, 2024; Rider, 1988; Sundt, 2021). For example, the story of King Oedipus, who is doomed to fulfill a tragic prophecy despite his best efforts to avoid it, raises questions about free will versus predestination—a philosophical debate that continues to intrigue scholars and thinkers (Kai, 2023; Köse, 2022; Ocak & Ayhan, 2022; Rudnytsky, 1982).

The rich narratives of ancient Greek mythology provide fertile ground for cultivating critical thinking in students. Engaging with these stories allows students to practice essential skills such as analysis, interpretation, and ethical reasoning. As students delve into these myths, they are encouraged to go beyond the surface-level plot and explore the deeper meanings and implications of the stories. One way to engage students in critical thinking is by examining

the motivations and actions of mythological characters. For instance, why does Achilles choose glory over a long life? What drives Medea to commit acts of revenge? (Fisher *et al.*, 2020; Paulsen, 2023; Smith & Trzaskoma, 2022). By analyzing these characters' decisions and the consequences that follow, students learn to consider the complexities of human behavior, the impact of societal expectations, and the moral dilemmas that arise in extreme circumstances. This kind of analysis helps students develop empathy and a nuanced understanding of human nature. Ancient Greek myths often present ethical and moral quandaries that are ripe for discussion and debate. The myth of Antigone, for example, confronts students with the conflict between obeying the law and following one's moral convictions. Should Antigone have defied King Creon's decree to honor her brother with a proper burial? (Contu, 2023; Dawson, 2020; de Fátima Silva, 2017; Morales, 2020; Özkaya, 2023; Sourvinou-Inwood, 1989; Yıldırım, 2022). Such stories invite students to reflect on the tension between duty to the state and personal ethics, encouraging them to consider multiple perspectives and the potential consequences of different actions. By engaging with these narratives, students are not only learning about the past but also developing the ability to think critically about moral and ethical issues in their own lives. They learn to weigh different values, assess the impact of actions on others, and construct reasoned arguments based on evidence and logical reasoning (Anhalt, 2017; Dowden & Livingstone, 2011; Frias *et al.*, 2015; Rose, 1991; Sansom *et al.*, 2022; Yao, 2021).

Ancient Greek religion is also closely intertwined with the development of Western philosophy. The religious beliefs and practices of the Greeks influenced the work of philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, who often engaged with religious themes in their philosophical inquiries. For example, Plato's *Republic* explores the concept of justice, a central concern in many Greek myths, through philosophical dialogue (Allen, 1965; Annas, 1982; Brisson, 1998; Burnyeat, 2009; Buxton, 1999; Collobert *et al.*, 2012; Ferrari, 2007; Fowler, 2011; Howland, 2006; Lear, 2006; Most, 2012; Partenie, 2009; Rowe, 1999; Segal, 1978). Meanwhile, Aristotle's ideas about virtue and the good life are deeply rooted in the moral and ethical questions that pervade Greek mythology. Studying this intersection between religion and philosophy encourages students to think critically about the nature of belief, morality, and the human condition. It also helps them understand how ancient Greek thought laid the foundation for many of the philosophical debates that continue to shape Western intellectual traditions.

4. ANALYZING MYTHS: ENCOURAGING DEEP INTERPRETATION AND PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

One of the most effective ways to cultivate critical thinking through the study of ancient Greek religion is by engaging students in the analysis of myths. Ancient Greek myths are rich with characters who confront profound ethical and moral dilemmas, making them ideal tools for teaching ethical reasoning—a critical component of critical thinking. These narratives do more than

entertain; they challenge readers to reflect on difficult choices, consider the implications of various actions, and explore the tensions between conflicting values. By analyzing these dilemmas, students can develop their moral reasoning skills, learning to navigate the complexities of decision-making in both personal and societal contexts.

Take, for instance, the myth of Prometheus, a Titan who defied Zeus, the king of the gods, to bring fire to humanity. This story is rich in symbolic meaning and serves as a powerful narrative for exploring themes of rebellion, knowledge, and the consequences of challenging authority. Prometheus' act of defiance can be seen as a symbol of human curiosity and the pursuit of knowledge. By stealing fire, Prometheus is not just providing humanity with a physical tool but also with the metaphorical light of reason and civilization. Fire represents technology, progress, and the ability to transform the world, which are fundamental aspects of human development. However, Prometheus' punishment by Zeus—being bound to a rock where an eagle eats his liver daily—raises critical questions about the cost of defiance and the limits of human aspiration. Should individuals challenge authority in the pursuit of knowledge, even at great personal risk? What responsibilities come with the power that knowledge bestows? These questions are central to the story and provoke deep reflection on the balance between ambition and caution, progress and ethics. Through the analysis of Prometheus' story, students can engage in discussions about the nature of innovation, the ethical implications of scientific and technological advancements, and the potential consequences of challenging established norms or authorities. This process encourages students to think critically about the moral and ethical dimensions of human actions, both in the past and in contemporary society (Blanariu, 2017; Cameron, 1943; Conboy, 2019; Kazamias, 2009; Marshall & Ojiako, 2010; Peretti, 2009; Ray, 1973; Townsend, 1972).

Another quintessential myth for cultivating critical thinking is the tale of Oedipus, a king who unknowingly fulfills a prophecy that foretold he would kill his father and marry his mother. This myth is not only a tragic story but also a profound exploration of fate, free will, and the limitations of human understanding. The myth of Oedipus confronts students with the tension between fate and free will. Despite his efforts to avoid the prophecy, Oedipus ultimately fulfills it, raising questions about whether humans have control over their destinies or whether their lives are predetermined by forces beyond their control. This dilemma is at the heart of many philosophical and theological debates, making the myth an ideal starting point for discussions about determinism, autonomy, and the nature of human agency. Moreover, the story of Oedipus is rich in tragic irony, a literary device where the audience is aware of the truth that the characters are not. Oedipus' relentless pursuit of the truth about his origins, driven by a desire to avoid the prophecy, ultimately leads him to uncover the very reality he sought to escape. This irony not only heightens the tragedy of the story but also invites students to reflect on the dangers of knowledge and the limits of human understanding. Analyzing the myth of Oedipus encourages students to grapple with difficult questions about the extent of human control over life's

outcomes and the potential consequences of our choices. It also prompts them to consider the role of knowledge in shaping our destiny and whether the pursuit of truth is always desirable or sometimes fraught with peril (Datan, 1988; Kai, 2023; Köse, 2022; Lacoue-Labarthe & Macey, 2003; Modellmog, 1993; Ocak & Ayhan, 2022; Rudnytsky, 1982).

The myth of Sisyphus also offers a wide field of philosophical analysis, enhancing critical thinking. Sisyphus, the king of Corinth, was condemned by the gods to eternally roll a boulder up a hill, only for it to roll back down each time he neared the top. His punishment was a result of his cleverness in tricking the gods, especially by cheating death twice. This myth can be used to explore the concept of existentialism, particularly the idea of the absurd, as later elaborated by the philosopher Camus (1990). Students can discuss the nature of Sisyphus' punishment, the futility of his task, and what this says about human life and the pursuit of meaning in a seemingly indifferent universe (Bowker, 2022; Francev, 2022; Gardner, 2021; Hobson, 2017; Lamb, 2012; Nathan, 2000).

The myth of Icarus is a well-known one: Icarus, the son of the master craftsman Daedalus, escapes from the island of Crete using wings made of feathers and wax. Despite his father's warnings, Icarus flies too close to the sun, causing the wax to melt and leading to his fall into the sea, where he drowns. This myth addresses themes of hubris, the dangers of over-ambition, and the consequences of ignoring wisdom and moderation. It invites students to think critically about the balance between ambition and recklessness and the human tendency to overreach, often with disastrous results (Anderson, 1974; Farrell, 1992; Hammond, 2002; Pirrie, 2015; Restivo, 2022; Sadler-Smith, 2020; Yildirmaz, 2022).

One of the most instructive myths, and one of the most widespread, is the myth of Pandora, the first woman who was created by the gods and was given a jar (often mistranslated as a box) containing all the evils of the world. Out of curiosity, she opened it, releasing these evils into the world, leaving only Hope inside once she closed it again. This myth provides a rich ground for exploring the nature of curiosity, the origin of evil, and the duality of hope as both a blessing and a curse. Students can engage in discussions about the implications of knowledge and curiosity and whether hope is a force for good or a means of prolonging suffering (Alcoloumbre, 2022; Barrell, 1992; Bell, 2006; Butler, 2005; Geoghegan, 2008; Greenhalgh *et al.*, 2024; Haynes, 2020; Magrini, 2020).

Narcissus, a beautiful young man, fell in love with his own reflection in a pool of water, becoming so entranced that he eventually wasted away and died, turning into the flower that bears his name. This myth is a potent exploration of self-love, vanity, and the dangers of excessive self-focus. It invites discussions about the balance between healthy self-regard and narcissism and how this affects interpersonal relationships and one's own identity (Basbaum, 2022; Bergmann, 1984; Durst, 2002; Hannan, 1992; Hermans & Van Gilst, 1991; Spaas, 1996; Vinge, 2020).

The *Iliad* is in itself a special field of analysis at all levels, from the psychoanalytic to the sociological, fueling fruitful debates on its role in strengthening critical thinking. Paris,

a prince of Troy, is asked to judge which of the three goddesses—Hera, Athena, or Aphrodite—is the fairest. Each goddess offers him a bribe: Hera offers power, Athena offers wisdom and skill in battle, and Aphrodite offers the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen. Paris chooses Aphrodite, leading to the events that spark the Trojan War. This myth can be used to explore the themes of choice, consequence, and the subjective nature of value. Students can discuss how decisions based on personal desires rather than ethical considerations can lead to far-reaching consequences, as well as the concept of “moral blindness” and the costs of favoritism (Cassirer *et al.*, 2020; Cyrino, 2022; Davies, 2003; Foley, 2021; Frade, 2022; Maurice, 2022; Souris, 2011).

One of the most famous ethical dilemmas in Greek mythology is faced by Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*. Achilles, the greatest warrior of the Greeks, is presented with a choice that embodies the conflict between a short, glorious life and a long, uneventful one. This decision is not just about personal fate; it reflects broader questions about the nature of honor, the pursuit of excellence, and the meaning of life itself. Achilles' dilemma can be seen as a reflection of the Greek heroic ideal, which placed immense value on glory and fame—qualities that could outlive a person and grant them immortality in the memory of others. However, the cost of this glory is his own life, which Achilles must sacrifice to achieve it. This raises significant ethical questions: Is it worth sacrificing one's life for the sake of eternal renown? Should personal safety and long-term well-being be sacrificed for the fleeting moments of greatness? What does this choice say about the value placed on life versus legacy? Students can engage with this dilemma by debating what they would do in Achilles' place. This discussion can lead to a deeper exploration of concepts such as the value of life, the nature of heroism, and the pursuit of personal goals versus societal expectations. By weighing these factors, students learn to navigate the tension between competing values and to appreciate the complexity of ethical decision-making.

Theseus, a hero of Athens, volunteers to enter the labyrinth and slay the Minotaur, a creature that is half-man, half-bull, to end the tribute of youths sent by Athens to Crete. With the help of Ariadne's thread, he navigates the labyrinth, kills the Minotaur, and escapes. This myth touches on themes of heroism, sacrifice, and the confrontation with one's own inner “monsters” or fears. It also allows for a discussion of the ethics of power, the responsibilities of leadership, and the complexity of human nature, symbolized by the hybrid Minotaur (Egan, 2021; Felix, 2009; Fernández-Cano *et al.*, 2012; Futter, 2023; Kinnas *et al.*, 2023; Roskam, 2023; Toscano, 2018).

Another powerful example of an ethical dilemma in Greek mythology is found in Sophocles' *Antigone*. The titular character, Antigone, faces a dire choice between obeying the laws of the state, as decreed by King Creon, and fulfilling her moral duty to bury her brother, Polynices, according to divine law. This conflict is a classic example of the struggle between civic duty and personal morality, a theme that remains deeply relevant in contemporary discussions of ethics and justice. Antigone's dilemma forces students to consider the weight of legal authority versus

moral responsibility. On one hand, Creon represents the rule of law, which is essential for maintaining order in society. On the other hand, Antigone represents the moral imperative to honor the dead and follow the unwritten laws of the gods, which she believes supersede human laws. This story invites students to reflect on questions such as: When is it justified to disobey the law? What are the consequences of placing personal morality above societal rules? How do we balance our duties to the state with our ethical obligations to family and religion? Through this analysis, students can explore the nuances of moral reasoning and consider how similar conflicts might arise in their own lives (Contu, 2023; Dawson, 2020; de Fátima Silva, 2017; Morales, 2020; Özkaya, 2023; Sourvinou-Inwood, 1989).

By analyzing myths like those above, students are not just learning about ancient stories; they are engaging in a deeper exploration of ideas that resonate across time and cultures. These myths serve as entry points into discussions about fundamental aspects of human existence, such as the tension between individual agency and societal constraints, the ethical implications of actions, and the search for meaning in a complex and often ambiguous world (Buxton, 2022; Zgoll, 2020).

The process of myth analysis also encourages critical reflection and dialogue among students. As they discuss the motivations of characters, the moral dilemmas they face, and the broader themes of the stories, students develop the ability to consider multiple perspectives, weigh evidence, and construct reasoned arguments. The process of analyzing these ethical dilemmas helps students develop crucial moral reasoning skills. By considering the choices faced by characters like Achilles and Antigone, students learn to weigh different values and principles against one another. They are encouraged to think about the potential consequences of various actions, not only for the individuals involved but also for the broader community. This analytical approach fosters an educational environment where students are encouraged to question assumptions, challenge interpretations, and engage in thoughtful debate (Ventoulis & Xinogalos, 2022).

When students are encouraged to analyze these myths, they learn to move beyond surface-level understanding. They are prompted to ask questions such as: What do these myths reveal about ancient Greek values? How do the actions of the gods and heroes reflect broader societal norms or philosophical ideas? What are the implications of these stories for understanding concepts such as fate, justice, or hubris? Through such inquiries, students engage in higher-order thinking, evaluating the narratives and forming their interpretations.

Moreover, such discussions often reveal the complexity of moral decision-making, underscoring the importance of considering multiple perspectives. For example, while Achilles' decision might be seen as noble by some, others might view it as reckless or self-centered. Similarly, while Antigone's defiance can be seen as an act of courage, it can also be interpreted as a dangerous challenge to the rule of law. Encouraging students to explore these different viewpoints helps them to understand that ethical dilemmas are rarely black and white and that real-world decisions often involve navigating shades of gray.

These mythological dilemmas also provide a bridge for students to apply ethical reasoning to contemporary issues. The questions of honor versus safety and law versus morality are not confined to ancient Greece. They echo modern debates about war, civil disobedience, whistleblowing, and individual rights versus collective responsibility. They draw parallels between the dilemmas faced by ancient Greek characters and those encountered in today's world. Students can better understand the relevance of ethical reasoning in their own lives and in the broader societal context.

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: ENCOURAGING BROADER PERSPECTIVES

Teaching ancient Greek religion through comparative analysis is a highly effective method for fostering critical thinking. By comparing Greek religious beliefs and practices with those of other ancient cultures, such as the Egyptians or Mesopotamians, or even with modern religious traditions, students are encouraged to engage in a deeper exploration of how and why different religious systems develop. This approach not only enhances their understanding of Greek religion but also helps them appreciate the broader context of religious diversity and its implications.

5.1. Analyzing Greek Religion in Context

Ancient Greek religion is characterized by its pantheon of anthropomorphic gods, each with distinct personalities, powers, and domains. The Greek gods are portrayed with human-like traits, including emotions, conflicts, and desires. This anthropomorphism reflects a worldview where divine and human realms are closely intertwined, influencing everything from morality to cosmology. To deepen their understanding, students can compare Greek religious beliefs with those of other ancient civilizations. For instance:

- **Egyptian Religion:** Unlike the Greek pantheon, Egyptian religion featured a complex array of gods, often depicted with animal heads or as abstract forms. The Egyptians had gods associated with natural forces and cosmic order, such as Ra, the sun god, and Osiris, the god of the afterlife. Exploring these differences helps students understand how different cultures personified divine forces and their implications for religious practices and societal values (Alm, 2012; Bell, 1953; Bleeker, 1975; Bonnefoy, 1992; Flinders Petrie, 2021; Frankfort, 1948; La'Da, 2016; Wiedemann, 2003).
- **Mesopotamian Religion:** Mesopotamian religion, with its pantheon of gods like Marduk and Ishtar, was deeply intertwined with the state and cosmological order. The concept of divine kingship and the role of deities in maintaining cosmic and social order contrasts with the more personal, character-driven interactions between Greek gods and humans. Comparing these systems can reveal insights into how religious beliefs shape political and social structures (Brandon, 2024; Graf, 2007; Lambert, 2016;

Schneider, 2011; Marcovich, 1996; Noegel, 2007; Roberts, 2020; Rutherford, 2020; Saadati & Kheirandish, 2020).

5.2. Comparative Analysis with Modern Religions

Comparing ancient Greek religion with modern religious traditions can further enrich students' understanding:

- Hinduism: The Greek pantheon's anthropomorphic gods can be contrasted with the more abstract and diverse deities of Hinduism, such as Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Hindu deities are often depicted with multiple arms and heads, representing various aspects of the divine. This comparison can lead to discussions about different approaches to representing the divine and the theological implications of these representations (Klostermaier, 2014; Lancaster, 1953; Morgan, 1987; Papageorgiou & Ziaka, 2020; Pugazhendhi, 2021; Ranganathan, 2022).
- Christianity: The Greek emphasis on fate and the predetermined nature of many myths can be contrasted with the Christian concept of free will and divine providence. For example, in Christianity, individuals are often seen as having the ability to choose their path and seek redemption, whereas Greek mythology frequently portrays fate as an unavoidable force. This comparison invites students to explore how different religions conceptualize human agency, divine intervention, and moral responsibility (Barnes, 2024; Eidinow *et al.*, 2016; Fairbanks, 1907; Ficino, 2022; Hopkins, 2023; Karamanolis, 2021; Makrides, 2009; Roberts, 2020).

5.3. Identifying Similarities and Differences

A key component of comparative analysis is identifying both similarities and differences between religious traditions. Students can investigate:

- Themes and Motifs: While the Greek gods are anthropomorphic and deeply involved in human affairs, many religions feature gods or spirits with roles in natural or cosmic order. Analyzing themes such as creation, destruction, and divine justice across different cultures can highlight universal concerns as well as unique cultural expressions (Eckert, 1963; Floky, 2018; Kearns, 2009; Larson, 2016; Zelinová & Škvrnda, 2023).
- Rituals and Practices: Students can compare religious rituals and practices, such as sacrifices, offerings, or ceremonies, to understand how different cultures address the divine and the sacred. For example, Greek rituals were often performed in public spaces and involved dramatic storytelling, while other traditions might emphasize private devotion or communal worship (Bremmer, 1983; Cole, 2004; Dodd & Faraone, 2013; Yioutsos, 2014).

5.4. Analyzing the Reasons behind Differences

Encouraging students to analyze the reasons behind similarities and differences in religious beliefs can deepen

their critical thinking. Students can explore how geographic, historical, and social contexts shape religious beliefs. For instance, the Greek focus on human-like gods may reflect the social structures and values of city-states, whereas the abstract deities of Hinduism might arise from different philosophical and theological developments. Comparing how different religions address social and ethical issues can reveal how religious beliefs serve societal functions. For example, Greek myths often reinforce social norms and values through stories of divine retribution and reward, while other religions might focus on ethical teachings or communal harmony.

5.5. Broadening Perspectives and Understanding

By engaging in comparative analysis, students gain a broader perspective on how religious beliefs are shaped by cultural, historical, and social contexts. There is a rich diversity in how different cultures conceive of and interact with the divine. Recognizing this diversity fosters tolerance and appreciation for different religious traditions. Also, cultural contexts deeply influence religious beliefs and practices. Understanding this influence helps students appreciate how religions evolve and adapt to different environments and historical circumstances. Religious beliefs are complex and multifaceted. Comparative analysis reveals that there are many ways to understand and address fundamental questions about existence, morality, and the divine.

6. CONCLUSION

Teaching ancient Greek religion in today's educational context offers significant pedagogical value, particularly in cultivating critical thinking skills. Through the analysis of myths, ethical dilemmas, philosophical inquiries, and comparative studies, students engage in deep, reflective thinking that challenges their assumptions and broadens their intellectual horizons. As educators seek to prepare students for the complexities of the modern world, ancient Greek religion provides a rich and relevant resource for developing the critical thinking skills that are essential for success in both academic and real-world contexts. By exploring the beliefs and practices of this ancient civilization, students not only gain a deeper understanding of the past but also sharpen their ability to think critically, reason ethically, and engage with diverse perspectives.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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