

Sisyphus

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sisyphus>

A man who was both greedy and deceitful, but at the same time lauded as clever and crafty. Crafty odysseus vs crafty Sisyphus.

Sisyphus punishment vs test.

In [Greek mythology](#) **Sisyphus** or **Sisyphos** (/ˈsɪsɪfəs/; [Ancient Greek](#): Σίσυφος *Sísuphos*) was the king of [Ephyra](#) (now known as [Corinth](#)). He was punished for his self-aggrandizing craftiness and deceitfulness by being forced to roll an immense boulder up a hill only for it to roll down when it nears the top, repeating this action for eternity. Through the [classical influence](#) on modern culture, tasks that are both [laborious](#) and [futile](#) are therefore described as **Sisyphean** (/ˌsɪsɪˈfiːən/).<sup>[2]</sup>

Sisyphus and his brother Salmoneus were known to hate each other, and Sisyphus consulted with the [Oracle](#) of [Delphi](#) on just how to kill Salmoneus without incurring any severe consequences for himself. From [Homer](#) onward, Sisyphus was famed as the craftiest of men. He seduced Salmoneus's daughter [Tyro](#) in one of his plots to kill Salmoneus, only for Tyro to slay the children she bore him when she discovered that Sisyphus was planning on using them eventually to dethrone her father.

## Cheating death<sup>[edit]</sup>

King Sisyphus also betrayed one of Zeus's secrets by revealing the whereabouts of [Aegina](#), (an [Asopid](#) who was taken away by Zeus) to her father (the river god [Asopus](#)) in return for causing a spring to flow on the Corinthian [acropolis](#).<sup>[3]</sup>

Zeus then ordered Death (in Greek, [Thanatos](#)) to chain King Sisyphus down below in [Tartarus](#). Sisyphus was curious as to why [Charon](#), whose job it was to guide souls to the Underworld, had not appeared on this occasion. King Sisyphus slyly asked Thanatos to demonstrate how the chains worked. As Thanatos was granting him his wish, Sisyphus seized the opportunity and trapped Thanatos in the chains instead. Once Thanatos was bound by the strong chains, no one died on earth. This caused an uproar especially for [Ares](#) (who was annoyed that his battles had lost their fun because his opponents would not die), and so he intervened. The exasperated Ares freed Thanatos and turned King Sisyphus over to him.<sup>[9]</sup>

In another version, [Hades](#) was sent to chain Sisyphus and was chained himself. As long as Hades was tied up, nobody could die. Because of this, sacrifices could not be made to the gods, and those that were old and sick were suffering. The gods finally threatened to make life so miserable for Sisyphus that he would wish he were dead. He then had no choice but to release Hades.<sup>[10]</sup>

Before King Sisyphus died, he had told his wife to throw his naked body into the middle of the public square (purportedly as a test of his wife's love for him). This caused King Sisyphus to end up on the shores of the river [Styx](#). Then, complaining to [Persephone](#), goddess of the Underworld, that this was a sign of his wife's disrespect for him, King Sisyphus persuaded her to allow him to return to the upper world. Once back in Ephyra, the spirit of King Sisyphus scolded his wife for not burying his body and giving it a proper funeral (as a loving wife should). When King Sisyphus refused to return to the Underworld, he was forcibly dragged back there by [Hades](#).<sup>[11]</sup> In another version of the myth,

Persephone was tricked by Sisyphus that he had been conducted to [Tartarus](#) by mistake, and so she ordered that he be released.<sup>[12]</sup>

In *Philoctetes* by [Sophocles](#), there is a reference to the father of [Odysseus](#) (rumoured to have been Sisyphus, and not [Laërtes](#), whom we know as the father in the *Odyssey*) upon having returned from the dead. [Euripides](#), in *Cyclops*, also identifies Sisyphus as Odysseus' father.

## Punishment in the Underworld<sup>[edit]</sup>

As a punishment for his trickery, Zeus made King Sisyphus roll a huge boulder endlessly up a steep hill.<sup>[13][14]</sup> The maddening nature of the punishment was reserved for King Sisyphus due to his [hubristic](#) belief that his cleverness surpassed that of Zeus himself. Zeus accordingly displayed his own cleverness by enchanting the boulder into rolling away from King Sisyphus before he reached the top, which ended up consigning Sisyphus to an eternity of useless efforts and unending frustration. Thus it came to pass that pointless or interminable activities are sometimes described as *Sisyphean*. King Sisyphus was a common subject for ancient writers and was depicted by the painter [Polygnotus](#) on the walls of the [Lesche](#) at [Delphi](#).<sup>[15]</sup>

## Interpretations<sup>[edit]</sup>

Sisyphus as a symbol for continuing a senseless war. Johann Vogel: *Meditationes emblematicae de restaurata pace Germaniae*, 1649

According to the [solar theory](#), King Sisyphus is the disk of the sun that rises every day in the east and then sinks into the west.<sup>[16]</sup> Other scholars regard him as a personification of waves rising and falling, or of the treacherous sea.<sup>[16]</sup> The 1st-century BC [Epicurean](#) philosopher [Lucretius](#) interprets the myth of Sisyphus as personifying politicians aspiring for political office who are constantly defeated, with the quest for power, in itself an "empty thing", being likened to rolling the boulder up the hill.<sup>[17]</sup> [Friedrich Welcker](#) suggested that he symbolises the vain struggle of man in the pursuit of knowledge, and [Salomon Reinach](#)<sup>[18]</sup> that his punishment is based on a picture in which Sisyphus was represented rolling a huge stone [Acrocorinthus](#), symbolic of the labour and skill involved in the building of the Sisyphium. [Albert Camus](#), in his 1942 essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, saw Sisyphus as personifying the absurdity of human life, but Camus concludes "one must imagine Sisyphus happy" as "The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart." More recently, [J. Nigro Sansonese](#),<sup>[19]</sup> building on the work of [Georges Dumézil](#), speculates that the origin of the name "Sisyphos" is onomatopoeic of the continual back-and-forth, susurrant sound ("siss phuss") made by the breath in the nasal passages, situating the mythology of Sisyphus in a far larger context of archaic (see [Proto-Indo-European religion](#)) trance-inducing techniques related to breath control. The repetitive inhalation–exhalation cycle is described esoterically in the myth as an up–down motion of Sisyphus and his boulder on a hill.

In experiments that test how workers respond when the meaning of their task is diminished, the test condition is referred to as the Sisyphusian condition. The two main conclusions of the experiment are that people work harder when their work seems more meaningful, and that people underestimate the relationship between meaning and motivation.<sup>[20]</sup>

In his book *The Philosophy of Recursive Thinking*,<sup>[21]</sup> German author Manfred Kopfer suggested a viable solution for Sisyphus punishment. Every time Sisyphus reaches the top of the mountain, he breaks off a stone from the mountain and carries it down to the lowest point. This way, the mountain will eventually be levelled and the stone cannot roll down anymore. In Kopfer's interpretation, the solution turns the punishment by the gods into a test for Sisyphus to prove his worthiness for godlike

deeds. If Sisyphus is able "to move a mountain", he shall be allowed to do what otherwise only gods are entitled to do.

.3] And Sisyphus, son of Aeolus, founded Ephyra, which is now called Corinth,<sup>145</sup> and married Merope, daughter of Atlas. They had a son Glaucus, who had by Eurymede a son Bellerophon, who slew the fire breathing Chimera.<sup>146</sup> But Sisyphus is punished in Hades by rolling a stone with his hands and head in the effort to heave it over the top; but push it as he will, it rebounds backward.<sup>147</sup> This punishment he endures for the sake of Aegina, daughter of Asopus; for when Zeus had secretly carried her off, Sisyphus is said to have betrayed the secret to Asopus, who was looking for her.

And I saw Sisyphus at his endless task raising his prodigious stone with both his hands. With hands and feet he tried to roll it up to the top of the hill, but always, just before he could roll it over on to the other side, its weight would be too much for him, and the pitiless stone would come thundering down again on to the plain. Then he would begin trying to push it up hill again, and the sweat ran off him and the steam rose after him.

Is Sisyphus a hero or a villain

A villain he would be if, his faults are that he is deceitful and greedy, for wanting the downfall of his friend and neighboring king, by way of deceit. He is a hero if he is clever, and if cleverness is above all else he does. Cheating death is clever and not disastrous, tricking a river god and Zeus is cleverness.

His eternal task rolling a boulder up a mountain. There are two main interpretations, it is a punishment or it is a test. A punishment for his actions when he is alive which in all honesty he should be punished for. Or a test, in which if he moves a mountain little by little he is worthy of escaping death which only a god can do. Camus, in his essay would argue he is happy for though there is no meaning to his task he is doing it so it must give him joy. I would argue forever moving and going nowhere is pointless, and deluding yourself otherwise is foolish. In the lens of nostalgia, there is no progress gazing on past and perfect glory that never existed except for the privileged and the few.

Is it then a punishment or a test? If it is not a punishment it would mean that his crimes were not crimes but simply actions of a clever man. It means man should aim to escape death and become gods. So it is a condoned action, but if we know gods. It seems out of character.

If it is a test, if a man can move mountains. He shall escape, what does it mean if the mountain was moved at the expense of others. It is delusion. Buried in rubble are the people he rolled over with his boulder.

He was punished because he believed that he was exceptional, an exception in his delusion he has trampled over others.

His current predicament is a result of his own actions.

Whether it is a punishment or a test depends on your own self-delusion.

If the end of the world is your fault, and you survive are you a murderer, or have you been chosen by some higher being to live on because you are worthy.

To make your choices and progress is a responsibility, because life is absurd and has no reason.