

Guide to Lecture 15: Introduction to Pythagoras Part 2

A) Cosmology (part 2).

a) Four causes below sphere of Moon:

- i) God. Safeguards us; also called providence/foresight; causes things to our advantage.
 - ii) Fate. Orderly, determined arrangement of the world in general, that makes one thing follow necessary from another (including biological features of us).
 - iii) Choice. What is in our power.
 - iv) Fortune. Spontaneous and casual events, primarily the unexpected and unlucky; traditionally this referred to the fact that even simple events have such a complicated background we cannot hope to trace their causal relations fully.
- b) **Souls.** Relation to Thales. Pythagoreans emphasize the *daimons* (spirits) which cause both disease and health, and dreams. They seem to bridge the gap between Fate and Fortune. Relation to Iamblichus.

B) Ethics.

a) Use of “symbols.” Examples:

- i) “Do not unload people, but load them up.” Discourage idleness and encourage virtue, the ability to bear burdens. Extends to disapproval of suicide.
- ii) “Eat not in the chariot.” Do not eat in the midst of hurried, important business. Link to modern lunch breaks?
- iii) “Do not stick iron into the footsteps of a man.” Do not ruin the memory of someone.

b) Music therapy.

- i) Apply principles of music to remedy human manners and passions. Begin with more sensuous appreciation of beauty, then move on to more abstract principles.
- ii) Pythagorean ideas here live on in Plato and medieval medicine (and modern governments disapproving of certain music)
- iii) Modern attitude to music (especially among teenagers) is contrary to Pythagoreanism, reinforcing extreme emotions instead of seeking balance.

c) Orphism and Reincarnation.

- i) Orphics believed in reincarnation; soul is a spark of Dionysius bound to the body as in a tomb; we are in a state of forgetfulness of our true nature. Clear links to Gnostics and Platonism. Need to purify ourselves to regain our true nature as divine beings.
- ii) Pythagoras taught reincarnation; soul is divine; maybe we can be freed from reincarnation through purification. But what kind: Pythagoras and Iamblichus are more on the action and ritualistic side, Plato and Gnostics more on the cognitive side. But we do need both.

d) Educational theory.

- i) Knowledge is like the number 3, joining knower and known in a relationship. Possible connection to the trine aspect and composite charts.
- ii) Music therapy (see above)
- iii) Four-fold division of mathematical studies: arithmetic (number itself), geometry (number in space), music/harmonics (number in time), astronomy (number in space and time.) This was the medieval

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quadrivium. Add to this Platonic stereometry, behavior and characteristics of solid objects in 3-dimensional space, esp. pyramids, cones, etc.

e) **Reflection on traditional values.**

- i) **Justice.** Mutuality and equality is fundamental; need to cooperate as the body and soul do; possessions held in common. Injustice caused by association, need to extend this to non-human animals—so there is a connection between your attitude toward animals (think of the food industry) and humans. Injustice also comes sometimes from poverty: support yourself but avoid greed, be generous. Legislative justice better than judicial justice because it is preventative, like preventative medicine—so good legislators come from the Pythagorean school.
- ii) **Temperance/self-control.** Use images of fire and sword to help avoid excess and irregularity; avoid foods that make vigilance and reasoning difficult (e.g., sugar, caffeine); make sumptuous food and then give it away (Stoic example from Epictetus: take large sip of cold water when thirsty, then spit it out and tell no one); abstain from costly jewelry, practice silence to understand reverence; give advice to young people without envy; punish when you are no longer angry; need to raise children with an eye to how they will be prepared for next stage in life; avoid acts whose sole purpose is pleasure; many human desires are false or artificial or contradictory.
- iii) **Courage.** Mainly shown through example of Pythagoras: taking risks by leaving home, undergoing dangers, resisting and trying to reform rough and dangerous men and tyrants. But also a group of

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Pythagoreans was persecuted and turned to face their attackers rather than go through a field of beans.

- iv) **Friendship.** An overarching concept: friendship between people, between teachings, between soul and body, family members, with other animals, etc.
- f) **The soul, its nature and care.**
 - i) Humans are microcosms, having all powers in the universe but to differing degrees than other things. The soul is like a chariot—this was used by Parmenides, Plato, and in the Tarot card “The Chariot.” Need to be wise in order to control the “horses” or passions.
 - ii) Hierarchy of human types, based on types of pursuits and values. Psychic health occurs when three parts of the soul are brought into harmony (not the same as equality):

Pythag. Soul	Objects of Desire	Plato’s soul	Objects of Desire
Curious	Knowledge	Rational	Wisdom
Ambitious	Honor	Spirited	Courage
Covetous	Profit	Desirous	Temperance

- iii) Pythagoras (and Plato) likened the soul to a garment, and knowledge or habits to dye: you need a purified soul and good knowledge or habits to make them go together. Good knowledge can’t take to an impure soul, any more than good ink to impure fabric, etc.
- g) **Political theory.** Pythagoreans identified justice with proportion, as Plato does in part.