

**Guide to Lecture 14: Introduction to Pythagoras Part 1**

A) **Introduction.** Previous philosophers have been known in fragments and poetic form, without clear sense of ethics or living philosophically; Pythagoras provides a Path or Tao that fleshes out many areas of philosophy, with spiritual and practical import. Still, his philosophy is not systematic and is mixed with other things.

B) **Themes in Pythagorean Philosophy:**

- i) **“All is Number.”** Number is quantitative and qualitative; contemplating and working with number is supposed to give us insight into reality; number manifests in many ways. Principles, Numbers, Harmonies, Geometricals. Mathematical discoveries, metaphysical principle of harmony.
- ii) **Cosmology.** Center of the earth is a “hearth”; there is also a counter-earth. Elemental qualities attributed to the seasons. Four causes below the sphere of the Moon: God, Fate, Choice, and Fortune. The air is full of souls.
- iii) **Ethics and education.** Use of “symbols” (enigmatic sayings) to promote harmony with universe and God; use of arts and music to heal harmony between soul and body and improve character; educational topics structured around types of number-relations and manifestations; reflections on traditional virtues and practical advice; reincarnation.

C) **Life and Community of Pythagoras**

- i) **Life of Pythagoras.** Born ca. 570 BC on island of Samos; life overlapped with Thales and Anaximander. Miracles attributed to him. Traveled to pre-Hellenistic Egypt, one likely source for the mathematical interests of Thales and Anaximander. Founded his own society in Italy ca. 530 BC, fled after a rebellion and died ca. 495 BC. Pythagorean communities lasted until about

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330 BC, overlapping with Aristotle and Plato. His life also overlapped with Buddha, Confucius, Zoroaster.

ii) **Structure and life of community.**

(1) Membership: observation of candidates; a Hearer for 3 years, observing silence as a Student for 5 years, then an Esoteric studying with Pythagoras behind the veil.

(a) Lectures included dogmatic teachings, ethics, and practical teachings.

(b) Those not advanced would be given money and released, treated as though they were dead or strangers.

(2) Dietary practices: vegetarianism (with some exceptions), abstention from beans, some abstained from wine.

(3) Daily routine: solitary walks, light meals, discussion of doctrines and improvement of manners, bathing, common dinners in groups of 10, white garments, avoidance of vigorous or violent activities.

(4) Other practices: entering temples on right hand (in emulation of odd numbers and One), exiting on left hand (in emulation of even numbers and the Dyad). No cremation, corpses wrapped in white garments in emulation of the principle of number.

iii) **Future influence.**

(1) Practices: vegetarianism, architecture, musical theory and therapy, meditation, reincarnation, communal living, “aesthetic education.”

(2) Attitudes: holistic attitudes, rejection of extreme subspecialization; rejection of materialism and greed.

(3) Other philosophers:

(a) Plato and Platonists. Importance of numbers, division of the soul into three parts and image of the soul as a chariot; a One above

Being. But: Plato wants to separate numbers more from the world, uses math as a preparation for study of divine things, and to investigate numbers with fewer visual aids; less emphasis on unifying levels of reality.

(b) Middle Platonists and Neopythagoreans: Nichomachus, Numenius (see later lectures).

(c) Neoplatonists: Porphyry and Plotinus, also St. Augustine.

#### **D) Cosmology (part 1): the Universe**

- i) The universe has a central hearth, a “mother” or “altar.” Surrounding the universe is also a ring of fire.
  - (1) Golden Dawn Zelator Ritual: diagram of the Table of Shewbread shows 12 images of Creative Ideas (i.e., the zodiac), with a Lamp or flame in the center, related to the Qabalistic feminine Shekinah and the Woman in the Book of Revelation. Two Shekinahs in Qabalism. Also, there is a constellation called the Altar in the Milky Way, whence souls were supposed to come and go.
  - (2) So feminine principles of creation and administration of the universe are preserved from Pythagoreanism and up to ceremonial traditions today.
- ii) Two versions of the bodies/spheres in the universe:
  - (1) 10: 1 sphere of fixed stars, 7 planets, earth, counter-earth.
  - (2) 12: 1 God/Forms, 7 planets, 4 sublunar elements, arranged from most orderly to least orderly (and evil).