

LACAN AND THE PYTHAGOREANS: A NOTE ON LACAN'S SEMINAR VIII, 5: 14TH DECEMBER 1960

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A large part of Lacan's Seminar VIII (henceforth S8) is devoted to a discussion of Plato's *Symposium*. Despite an initial, uncharacteristic reticence¹, Lacan clearly knows a great deal about the text and expounds it principally in relation to ἔρωϛ. In so doing, he aims to understand transference as an element in psychoanalytic treatment that resembles love² (S8, 5.2). Readers of Lacan's work will realise that the seminars were originally delivered to a live audience and only published some years later. As such they are, inevitably, full of contradictions, repetitions and uncertainty but at the same time profoundly challenging. This particular seminar forms an important part of the corpus of Lacan's work and is consistently characterised by penetrating comments. In the *Symposium*, Socrates argues that love is not of itself beautiful but a yearning or desire (πόθος) for beauty and that one can only desire that which one does not have. As the offspring of Poverty (Πενία), ἔρωϛ is 'a sign of deficiency', something 'ever dwelling in want' (Sym. 203d) and shows man to be incomplete. Over the years the tenor of Plato's thought on ἔρωϛ has been repeatedly reinterpreted (Mortley 1980). A weighty interpretation, thought to be based on an earlier traditional exegesis yet profoundly original, is found in the *Enneads* of Plotinus³ (Rist 1967). Written five centuries after Plato it became vastly influential in the late

¹ At the beginning of S8 Lacan seems unsure of himself and anxious that he may be thought insufficiently prepared to comment on the dialogue, insisting that he is not a philosopher, philologist or Hellenist (S8: 55). This is far from typical, Lacan's delivery combining, in a particularly Gallic fashion, both bravado and a cultivated obscurity.

² Freud, in the preface to the 1920 edition of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* wrote that he considered Plato's *erōs* a notion identical to his concept of the libido ('*Sexualität der Psychoanalyse mit dem Eros des göttlichen Plato zusammentrifft*') (Freud 1920: 134). He relied largely for this opinion on an exceptionally inaccurate paper by Nachmansohn (1915) 'Freuds Libidotheorie verglichen mit Eroslehre Platons' *Internationale Zeitschrift für Ärztliche Psychoanalyse* III Jahrgang, Heft 1: 65-83, which he cited. Santas remarks that 'Freud did himself no favour relying on [it]' (Santas 1988: 155), see: Santas, G. (1988). *Plato and Freud. Two Theories of Love*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

³ As Philo before him, with a blend of Platonism, Stoicism and Neo-Pythagoreanism that was set to have a huge influence on the patristic writers, Plotinus interpreted the *Symposium* to express mystical experience in much the same way as Christian writers interpreted the erotic language of the *Canticle*. One difference, however, as Hadot (1973) noticed, is that while Platonic love has a masculine tonality, Plotinus uses feminine images to describe the soul, hence his use of Aphrodite as its symbol (Enn. 5, 8.13; 3, 5.3). Nonetheless, as Rist (1967: 228)

antique and medieval periods, and beyond. Porphyry suggests in VP 23 that Plotinus in his very manner of life followed ‘the ways set forth by Plato in the *Symposium*’⁴. Although Origen, a student of Clement of Alexandria, is usually cited as the first in our era to develop into a Christian concept ‘the heavenly Eros of Plato’s *Symposium*’ (Crouzel 1985: 123), the influence of the Platonic notion of ἔρωσ has come down to us principally through Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine⁵, both of whom were themselves immersed in the thought of Plotinus⁶. In Origen and Gregory ἔρωσ and ἀγάπη are not conflicting terms. To the contrary. They are interchangeable. The latter, whose position parallels in the East that of Augustine in the West, while quoting from the *Symposium* itself, emphasises, in the Platonic manner, the ‘insatiable’ nature of ἔρωσ and the way it is directed towards the good (ἀγαθόν) and the beautiful (καλόν) (Jaeger 1954: 76 n.2⁷). Augustine famously said that in Plotinus Plato lived again (Aug. c. acad.

points out, there are many passages in the *Enneads* where the ascent to the Good is described in terms of the *Symposium* (Enn. 6, 1.7, 12; 6, 7.22, 34, 35). It is the mind in love that grasps the One (Enn. 6, 7.31).

⁴ Since Arnou published his then pioneering study *Le désir de Dieu dans la philosophie de Plotin* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1921), it has been clear that ἔρωσ and desire are the keys to understanding the *Enneads*. Here ἔρωσ operates between the psychical level of individuals souls and νοῦς, and the noetic level of νοῦς and the One, which is wholly other (beyond knowledge and Being), yet intimately present. Armstrong discusses carefully the influence of Plotinus on Christian theology, see: Armstrong, A.H. (1940). *Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus*. An Analytical and Historical Study. Cambridge Classical Studies Volume VI. London: Cambridge University Press.

⁵ The transmission and transformation of Platonism in the West was also much influenced by Pseudo Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor and the Rhineland mystics including Meister Eckhart who, in turn, influenced Heidegger. It may not therefore, be inconceivable, to see, however indirectly, something of Plotinus in the thought of Lacan. See: Ivánka, E. (1964). *Plato Christianus. Übernahme und Umgestaltung des Platonismus durch die Väter. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag*. On the longevity of Neoplatonism in the East see Anthony Meredith (1990). *The Good and the Beautiful in Gregor of Nyssa EPMHNEYMATATA. Festschrift für H. Hörner zum sechzigsten Geburtstag* 133-45 (ed) H. Eisenberger. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag. On the influence of Plotinus and Meister Eckhart on Heidegger Caputo, J. D. (1986). *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought*. New York: Fordham University Press.

⁶ Origen cites Ignatius of Antioch who referred to Christ as Eros (Crouzel 1985: 123). For ἔρωσ used as a synonym of ἀγάπη cf. *Si ergo quaecumque de caritate scripta sunt, quasi de amore dicta suscipe nihil de nominibus curans; eadem namque in utroque virtus ostenditur* (Com. in Cant. Prol: 1.15. MPG 13, 70B) That *amor* equals ἔρωσ is shown by translation of Ignatius’ *Letter to the Romans* 7, 2: ὁ ἐμὸς ἔρωσ ἐσταυρωται as *meus autem amor crucifixus est* (ibid. 13, 70D). In Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Moses* erotic rather than agapetic language is to the fore, Gregory referring at 231D to ἔρωσ as a heightened form of ἀγάπη (v. Mos. 231D; on this see Meredith op. cit. n.4). The passage is almost certainly a reference to Sym. 201D: see Horn, G. (1925). *L’amour divin. Notes sur le mot “Eros” dans Grégoire de Nysse Revue d’ascétique et de la mystique* 6: 378-9. Ἐπιτεταμένη γὰρ ἀγάπη ἔρωσ λέγεται ᾧ οὐδεὶς ἐπαισχύνεται, ὅταν μὴ κατὰ σαρκὸς γένηται παρ’ αὐτοῦ ἢ τοξεία (hom. in Cant. MPG 44, 1048C). Jaeger comments that the Platonic concept of ἔρωσ or πόθος ‘permeates all [Gregory’s] works (passages are too numerous to quote or even to select a few at random)’, see: Jaeger 1954: 76 n.2. On Augustine’s debt to Plotinus see Rist (1964). Yet despite the patristic evidence, contemporary discussions on the Christian ideal of unselfish love have often taken Nygren’s simplistic distinction between ἔρωσ and ἀγάπη as their point of departure, see: Nygen, A. (1932/1939) [1930/36]. *Agape and Eros*. 2 vols (trans) A. E. Hebert and P. S. Watson. London: SPCK. It is a distinction that originates with Nygren who was mistaken both about the N.T. meaning of ἀγάπη and Greek pagan thought. His arguments have been systematically dismantled in relation to the first by Spicq and the second by Armstrong, see: (i) Spicq, C. (1958). *Agapē dans le Nouveau Testament*. 3 vols. Paris: Gabalda. Lacan refers to Nygen’s study, somewhat ambiguously, in Seminar 20: 76-7, 20th February 1973; and (ii) Armstrong, A.H. (1961). *Platonic Eros and Christian Agape Downside Review* 239: 219-30.

⁷ Gr. Nyss. instit. 40, 10; 80, 2; 81, 4. Cf. Armstrong, A. H. (1948). *Platonic Elements in St Gregory of Nyssa’s Doctrine of Man Dominican Studies* 1: 123-5.

III, 8.41) and it is in terms of the Platonic ἔρως that Augustine understood the NT command to love God and one's neighbour (Mt. xxii, 37, 39; Rist 1994). As such, love was a notion central to his ethics and he describes it as a force closely related to *voluntas* and directed toward virtue (Aug. de Trin. XV, 38; de civ. dei 11, 27; conf. 13, 12 and p. 443 n. 2)⁸. Following directly both the *Symposium* and Plotinus (Plot. Enn. I, 6), Augustine saw love as something that draws us simultaneously upwards and inwards towards the beautiful. From the sensible to the intelligible world (Aug. conf. 10.38). That this movement inwards and upwards is concurrent cannot be over emphasised. Plotinus and Augustine both speak of the inner life, turning within ourselves and inner experience in ways that are fully consonant with the Platonic tradition. Introspection is a turning towards the soul and the soul occupies a place between matter and pure intellect. They took it for granted that man is not separated from the One, as the One exists in the divine Nous. Thus, the more we become inner, the more we become ourselves by stepping beyond ourselves. As Pierre Hadot puts it, the divine principle, while being wholly transcendent or other, is at the same time the soul's deepest intimacy, although knowledge of this is, for most of us most of the time, unconscious (1973: 28). Lacan referred both to Plotinus and Augustine a number of times⁹. On occasions there seems to be a clear resonance of the Platonic tradition in the seminar, where at points he insists that that which is at the centre of us is excluded, exterior, and Other, 'although it is at the heart of me' (Lacan S7: 71). Indeed, as Miller noticed, Lacan was 'in a certain way' saying something very similar to Augustine (*Conf* iii, 6. 11¹⁰). For to refer to the unconscious as the discourse of the Other is speak of that which is 'more intimate than my intimacy... And this intimate that is radically Other, Lacan expressed with a single word: "extimacy"' (Miller 1994: 77).

It is within this overall context that, departing from the text of the *Symposium*, Lacan refers to the Pythagoreans in relation to ancient medicine. This paper concerns that degression (S8, 5¹¹) which is made in connection with the speech of the physician Eryximachus (Sym. 186a-

⁸ cf. Kusch, H. (1953). Studien über Augustinus I Trinitarisches in den Büchern 2-4 und 10-13 der Confessiones. *Festschrift Franz DORNSEIFF zum 65. Geburtstag* 129-39. Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut; also Harrison, S. (2006). *Augustine's Way into the Will. The Theological and Philosophical Significance of De Libero Arbitrio*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁹ In S8, 3.9 (30th November 1960), referring to Enn. II (this may be an error and Enn. III, 5 the intended reference), Lacan identifies Zeus, Aphrodite and Eros with the persons of the Trinity, making reference to '*un texte théologique sur la Trinité*'. The 'text' referred to is probably Augustine's *de Trinitate*. Although Lacan does not refer to Augustine in S8, he does mention him in a number of seminars and cites the treatise at least on two occasions: S11 (20th November 1963), S13 (1st December 1965).

¹⁰ '*tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*'.

¹¹ In the French text pages 84-88. The sections are numbered v 3 to v 7 in the English translation by Gallagher.

189b¹²). Scholars have paid a great deal of attention to this speech and it is a matter on which readers of the seminar do well to be cautious. Views on ancient medicine and on Plato's position in relation to it have fluctuated considerably over the years (Craik 2001). The shifts in scholarly opinion invariably revolving around interpretations of the *dramatis personae* and the part each character plays in the dialogue, particularly in terms of the meaning ascribed by Plato to τέχνη and its relationship to ἀρετή¹³.

Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans

Of Pythagoras himself we know very little, despite the fact that two major *Lives* have survived, those of Porphyry and his pupil Iamblichus. Although these follow, roughly, the same pattern as one another¹⁴, Neoplatonism underwent a number of shifts in emphasis, if not revisions following the death of Plotinus in 269 A.D. and we see this to some considerable extent in the contrast between Iamblichus and Proclus (O'Meara 1989). Pythagoras is said to have left Samos and settled in Croton in Southern Italy around 530 BC¹⁵. According to Aristoxenos, a

¹² The speech of Eryximachus has been interpreted, at least since the study by Gildersleeve in 1887, as dishonest and pedantic or merely as an amusing parody. Of those who have tried to rescue it by considering its place within the dialogue the most frequently cited is that of Edelstein. But the lines may be drawn too rigidly here. Leshner puts it well: 'Prima facie, it seems likely that *some* significant connection between tragedy, comedy and *erōs* is being suggested. But precisely what that connection was has proven difficult to say' (Leshner 2004: 78). See: Edelstein, L. (1945), *The Rôle of Eryximachus in Plato's Symposium Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 76: 85–103; Gildersleeve, B.L. (1887). *Studies in the Symposium of Plato Johns Hopkins University Circulars* 6 (55): 49-50; Leshner, J.H. (2004). *A Course on the Afterlife of Plato's "Symposium"* *The Classical Journal* 100 (1): 75–85. For a recent summary of the main points at issue see: Keime, C. (2018). *Le discours d'Éryximaque dans le Banquet de Platon (185e6-188e4): problèmes et fonction philosophique d'un éloge médical Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 44 (2): 87-109.

¹³ Over the last sixty years, the magisterial study by Werner Jaeger (1944) has been subject to manifold criticisms. However, it has hardly been surpassed in the way it situates medicine as the 'craft of healing' in relation to ethical knowledge, Socratic philosophy and general culture (ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία).

¹⁴ Of the many studies of Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans particular note should be made of that by Walter Burkert (1962). *Weisheit und Wissenschaft: Studien zu Pythagoras, Philolaos und Platon. Erlanger Beiträge zur Sprach- und Kunstwissenschaft*. Nuremberg: Hans Carl (Eng. trans: *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (trans) E. L. Minar. Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1972). In reviewing the evidence for the views of Pythagoras, Burkert steers a balanced middle course between the earlier opinions of Erich Frank (*Plato und die sogenannten Pythagoreer. Ein Kapitel aus der Geschichte des griechischen Geistes*. Halle an der Saale: Verlag von Max Niemeyer, 1923) and F.M. Cornford (*Mysticism and Science in the Pythagorean Tradition Classical Quarterly* 16: 137-50 and 17: 1-12, 1922-1923); cf. also Cornford's chapter *Mystery Religions and Pre-Socratic Philosophy in Cambridge Ancient History IV: 522-78* (eds) J.B. Bury, S.A. Cook and F.E. Adcock. Cambridge: University Press. A recent attempt to revise this well accepted reading has been made by Zhmud, L. (2012). *Pythagoras and the Early Pythagoreans* (trans) K. Windle and R. Ireland. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. However, Zhmud's argument is largely unconvincing because he includes a wide range of non-Pythagoreans.

¹⁵ Until Rohde publish, in two parts, an essay on Iamblichus in 1871-1872, it was assumed that Iamblichus was dependent on Porphyry. Rohde argued that this was not the case and that Iamblichus had relied on Neo-Pythagorean sources from the first and second centuries. Despite being mistaken, Rohde's opinion was almost universally accepted. See: Rohde, E. (1871 and 1872). *Die Quellen des Jamblichus in seiner Biographie des Pythagoras Rheinisches Museum für Philologie Neue Folge* 26: 554-76 and 27: 23-61. For a review of the biographical tradition of Pythagoras see the account by Philip, J. A. (1959). *The Biographical Tradition-Pythagoras Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 90: 185–94.

pupil of Aristotle, the reason for his departure from Samos was to escape the tyrant Polycrates (VP 9; Aristoxenus fr. 16; and cf. DL ii, 1-2¹⁶). At Croton he established a religious community or *hetaireia* of young men, known for its learning and investigation (ιστορίη). Plato only mentions him once, in Book 10 of the *Republic* where he also refers to the Pythagorean ‘way of life’; elsewhere, he has the tendency to refer to Pythagoreans anonymously¹⁷. Aristotle, who wrote a treatise about the Pythagoreans, shares this reticence about Pythagoras himself only mentioning him twice but is less shy about his followers¹⁸. Although the treatise is not extant, others quoted from it and it seems its emphasis was on the religious side of Pythagoreanism. It is most likely that Iamblichus had before him Porphyry’s *Life* when he sat down to write¹⁹. Both *Lives* are subsequent to Diogenes Laertius viii and differ considerably from it. Iamblichus is keen to emphasise Pythagoras’ character as a sage and the miraculous element in his life and both he and Porphyry are to a not inconsiderable extent hagiographers. But Iamblichus went further than Porphyry, at times pretty nigh subordinating Plato to Pythagoras. Proclus tries to redress the balance. The religious themes that are the focus here concern the objects of mathematics which are eternal and immaterial, and contrast significantly with the more strictly philosophical aspects of Pythagoreanism, the latter often described as ‘scientific’. Beyond the *Lives* a number of late authors preserved collections of aphorisms, transmitted orally, known as *acusmata*. They roughly fall into four types: those that concern abstinence, those on other prohibitions, those on harmony and those on the fate of the soul. Many amount to little more than proverbial wisdom. Pythagoras almost certainly wrote nothing (Josephus c. Ap. I, 163; Diels I.4, 18²⁰). Of the fifth century references we have for him, some suggest that his wisdom was dubious, that he taught reincarnation and that he was close to the Orphic cults. Dodds (1951) thought Pythagoras a ‘shaman’ but this seems unlikely, as the evidence for the influence

¹⁶ But there may be some confusion here with the dates, see Kirk (1983: 101).

¹⁷ Plat.Rep. 600b: συνουσία καὶ τοῖς ὑστέροις ὁδὸν τινα παρέδοσαν βίου Ὀμηρικῆν, ὥσπερ Πυθαγόρας αὐτὸς τε διαφερόντως ἐπὶ τούτῳ ἠγαπήθη, καὶ οἱ ὕστεροι ἔτι καὶ νῦν Πυθαγόρειον τρόπον ἐπονομάζοντες τοῦ βίου διαφανεῖς πῆ δοκοῦσιν εἶναι ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις.

¹⁸ Burnet, however, sees in Aristotle’s rather indirect way of speaking about the Pythagoreans, some doubt, on Aristotle’s part, as to who the genuine ones were (Burnet 1971).

¹⁹ Although almost half Iamblichus’ *Life* (*De Vita Pyth.*) is original, they shared a common Neo-platonic purpose in championing Greek philosophy in the face of Christianity. Dillon and Hershbell (1991) noticed some parallel NT miracle stories. Nauck lists forty-eight parallel passages, many of them quite lengthy, in the two *Lives*: Nauck, A. (1886). *Porphyrii. Philosophi Platonici* p. x-xi. Leipzig: Teubner. However, this did not stop some of the Church Fathers lavishing praise on Pythagoras, largely because of the teaching on the immortality of the soul that was ascribed to him (e.g. Jerome Ep. LX). The version of Pythagoreanism that came to be known by them being that set out by neo-Pythagorean authors such as Moderatus and Numenius. Only Aristotle resisted this Platonising interpretation of Pythagoreanism. Jerome even claimed to have read Pythagoras until Rufinus jeered at him by pointing out that, as all educated people knew, his writings, if they ever existed, were no longer extant. For this see Kelly, J.N.D. (1975). *Jerome. His Life, Writings, and Controversies* 16 and n. 34. London: Duckworth.

²⁰ Josephus’ view was accepted by Plutarch and Posidonius but not by DL. See Kirk et al. (1984: 216 n. 1).

of shamanistic culture from central Asian on Archaic Greece is weak (Kirk 1984: 229). It is more probable that he was simply a sage around whom a certain veneration grew up and to whom various ideas were later ascribed. By the beginning of our era, Philostratus would refer to him as an emissary of Zeus and the spiritual ancestor of Apollonius of Tyana. There is, however, little if anything to suggest that his methods were ‘scientific or rational’ (Kirk et al. 1984: 219).

In the *Phaedo* 96 b, 5 Plato credits Alcmaeon of Croton²¹ with being the first to recognise the brain as the seat of consciousness, a view later found in the Hippocratic corpus, though Aristotle and the Stoics continued to hold the earlier view that the heart was the seat of consciousness. According to Aristotle at *Met.* A5. 986a, 22 (Diels I. 14, a 31), as a young man, Alcmaeon may have known the elderly Pythagoras²². However, although Aristotle says Alcmaeon derived his theory of opposites from the Pythagoreans, he does not specifically identify him as a Pythagorean²³. His book, of which we have fragments, begins ‘Alcmaeon of Croton, son of Peirithous, spoke these words to Brotinus and Leon and Bathyllus...’ (fr. 1, Diels I. 14, b 1). DL viii, 83 cites the passage and includes Alcmaeon among the Pythagoreans and says that he studied with Pythagoras. Later authors such as Iamblichus (*V Pyth.* 104, 267), and the scholiast on Plato (*Alc.* 121e) also call Alcmaeon a Pythagorean. Up until the middle of the twentieth century the majority of scholars followed this tradition. But most ancient sources do not describe Alcmaeon as a Pythagorean, e.g. Clement (*Strom* vi, 16), Aetius (*Aet* v, 30, 1 in Diels I. 14, b 4); Theophrastus referred to him a number of times but never as a Pythagorean; Simplicius commented that some thought Alcmaeon a Pythagorean but notes that Aristotle denies it (*De An.* 32.3; also *Met.* A, 986a. 22 ff). Accordingly, the overwhelming majority of scholars since the 1950’s have regarded Alcmaeon as a figure independent of the Pythagoreans (Burkert 1972: 289). Nevertheless, he is significant and his theory of health and sickness may have influenced later Pythagoreanism (Burnet 1971).

Fifth century Pythagoreanism is known to us mostly through doxographical evidence. We have three brief fragments only that refer to the life of Philolaus, the leading Pythagorean

²¹ For a reliable account see: See Burnet (1971: 193-6).

²² Cf. Wachtler, J. (1896). *De Alcmaeone Crotoniata*. Leipzig: Teubner.

²³ The notion of opposite natural substances first appears in Anaximander (*Arist. Ph.* A1; Kirk 1983: 128-9) and recurs in Heraclitus, Parmenides, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, as well as in the Pythagoreans ‘certainly as early as Alcmaeon’ (Kirk 1983: 119).

philosopher of the fifth century. He was probably a contemporary of Socrates and appears in the *Phaedo*. According to DL viii, 84 and the medical historian Menon, he was from Croton (Diels I.32, A27), though Aristoxenus thought he was originally from Tarentum. He seems to have taught in Thebes in around 399 BC. From early on he was associated with a written form of Pythagorean teaching. The authenticity of the fragments of text ascribed to him and which we find in late authors, has been greatly contested (Philip 1966). But it is generally accepted that his three central ideas are (1) that ‘limiters’ and ‘unlimiteds’ are the basic concepts of philosophy (Diels I.32, fr.1; DL viii, 85). These are harmonised in nature where everything that exists is either one or the other or a combination of both (Diels I.32, fr.2; Stobaeus Anth. I. 21, 7^a). For nothing could be known if all things were unlimited (Diels I. 32, fr. 3; Iamblichus in Nicom. 7, 24); (2) all things are numbers, in the sense that that they can only be thought if they can be counted (Diels I.32, fr. 4; Stobaeus Anth. 1, 21, 7^b); and (3) that the necessary condition for the existence of different things in the world is dependent on them being ordered and that this implies they are locked together and the subject of harmony (ἁμονία) (Diels I.32, fr. 6; Stobaeus Anth. 1, 21, 7^d). Kirk sees in this third point both a continuation of a tradition - the stance, that is to say, of Xenophanes, Heraclitus and Alcmaeon – and something subtle and quite original. Namely, that ‘what we can know about the real being of things’ is only ‘but at least, this: it must be such as to supply the necessary conditions of the existence of the temporal things with which we are acquainted’ (Kirk 1984: 328).

Simmias and Cebes were young Pythagoreans (τῶν νεανίσκων) from Thebes. They are the principal interlocutors in the *Phaedo*. Both were followers of Philolaus (Phaed. 61, d.7) and they are also mentioned in the *Crito* 45, b. 3. Xenophon refers to them in his list of true followers of Socrates (Mem 1, 2.48) and as supporters of devotion to Pythagoras (see Burnet’s notes in *Crito* b 4 and *Phaed.* c. 1).

Diels devotes twenty-five pages to the Pythagorean school and much of this section of the collection is given over to passages from Aristotle, particularly from *Met.* A5, 6, 8; A7; and N3, 6²⁴. Aristotle is consistently vague about the Pythagoreans but commented, nonetheless, on their theory of mathematics, table of opposites, cosmogony, astronomy and ethics. He relied on Philolaus for an account of their cosmology and astronomy but on other, probably oral sources, for generalities concerning their teaching. Everything being an elaboration of the

²⁴ See also: *Pr.* 15; *de cael.* A1, B13; *Ph.* Γ1, 4, 5, Δ6; *Mete.* A8; *de an.* A2, 3; *Pol.* Θ5; and *de sens.* 3, 5.

doctrine of harmony and number. (Kirk 1984). The main point being to demonstrate that everything in the cosmos exhibits an intelligible order²⁵. Aristotle is critical of the Pythagorean view because he thinks it identifies and treats numbers as things. But it is difficult to know what exactly they contributed to the development of fifth century mathematics (Philip 1966). Kirk concludes

There is something rather magnificent about their attempt to show how the governing concept of *harmonia* unlocks the key to every area of philosophy: cosmology, astronomy, psychology; even their obsession with order in ethics and politics can be read as reflecting this central preoccupation.

Kirk 1984: 350

The Hippocratic and Cnidian medical schools

A great many works have been transmitted under the name of Hippocrates. The case for arguing that there were two schools of ancient Greek medicine, a Coan or Hippocratic school (the pseudepigrapha relate that Hippocrates was born on the island of Cos in the Aegean) and a Cnidian school has been debated by scholars and the literature is vast. This is because many of the medical treatises handed down to us in the *Corpus Hippocraticum* cannot be dated with any real precision. Littré, Hippocrates' editor, ordered the works between 1839 and 1881 in ten volumes. Those he considered more scientific he placed in the Coan school. Those that were cruder or more primitive he placed in the Cnidian school. Ilberg (1925) developed this distinction further. A century after Littré, Edelstein (1931; 1939) revised things and summed up a growing scepticism about Littré's arrangement of the works. He concluded that Hippocrates was an early physician whose works are lost 'since we cannot connect reports of his doctrine in the Classical period with any work extant in the Corpus' (Smith 1973: 570). Deichgräber (1933) developed Edelstein's position. The Ilberg and Deichgräber versions became the common view among scholars, that is, they became 'what everyone knows' (Smith 1973: 571). Thoroughly conversant with the arguments, Werner Jaeger in 1944 was aware that Littré's edition, although the best available for most of the corpus, was inadequate from the point of view of textual criticism. Shortly before Lacan made the remarks at issue, early that year, Robert Joly had published his *Recherches sur le traité pseudo-hippocratique du Régime*

²⁵ This, in itself, is not so far removed from Freud's belief that nothing was accidental, at least at the psychic level (Freud 1901) and Lacan's parallel explorations in relation to Aristotle Ph B, 196-7 (Lacan S11).

which covered similar ground²⁶. Others, for example, Lonie (1965), follows the same line of thought as Ilberg (Smith 1973: 573²⁷). More recently, the late Professor Wesley Smith, who edited the Hippocratic corpus for the Loeb series, drew attention to the significance of the historical redaction of the texts, suggesting that the distinction is something of a fiction. Holmes (1976) noticed that it mirrored a distinction between an interest in prognosis, on the part of those taking a Hippocratic position, and diagnosis, which originated in an individualism ‘long associated with the Coan treatises’ (Holmes 1976: 125 n. 16). The Cnidian treatises being considered more focussed on ‘ontological’ disease concepts or ‘disease entities’ (Holmes 1976: 125 n. 16; 159 n. 47).

Russell, Foulkes and Anderson

Here and in the subsequent session (21st December 1960, p. 98) Lacan recommends that those who could read English take up a copy of Bertrand Russell’s *Wisdom of the West* which had been published in the previous year: ‘*il comporte tout ce qu’il faut savoir depuis cette période féconde à laquelle je me réfère aujourd’hui, l’époque présocratique et socratique...*’ (S8, 5.3, p. 88)²⁸. Russell’s book had been written in old age; to be precise, when he was eighty-seven and was not translated into French until the following year²⁹. Generally, it was regarded as a light-weight, coffee table version of his earlier *History of Western Philosophy* which had been

²⁶ Joly addressed the question with even greater specificity in an article in the *Revue Des Études Grecques* (1961) that would more than likely already have been with the publisher when Lacan addressed his audience in the previous December. Had Lacan, perhaps, access to this prior to publication?

²⁷ Smith, in the first chapter of his 1979 study, gives a masterful account of Littré’s work. However, Lonie’s response to Smith’s criticisms of his study, suggests that the latter’s view needs to be read with some caution (Lonie 1978).

²⁸ There is nothing here to suggest that Lacan’s remarks were, in any way, disingenuous and Calum’s view that they were ‘facetious’ seems ill-founded (Calum 2020: 55). Lacan referred to Russell and the *Principia Mathematica* (1910-13) and the *Analysis of Mind* (1921), sometimes critically, at regular intervals, beginning with his thesis in 1932 and then between 1946 and 1975 (Benvenuto and Kennedy 1986). Indeed, his interest in Russell’s work received encouragement from Alexandre Koyré who had participated in discussions with Russell in 1912 on the foundations of mathematics (Burgoyne 2003). Although their thinking took an opposite direction. Russell, having started out as a mathematician, turned to philosophy to find a reason for believing in the truth of mathematics. While Lacan turned from linguistics to mathematics in an attempt to find a coherent structure to explain the truth of psychoanalysis. As well as the references to S8, already cited, see E 183 (1960 [1946]); S5 (6th November 1957); S9 (15th November, 6th and 20th December 1961; 24th January and 21st February 1962); S10 (20th March 1963); S11 (20th November 1963); S12 (9th December and 16th December 1964; 6th, 13th and 27th January 1965); S13 (12th January 1966); S14 (16th and 23rd November, 7th and 14th December 1966; 18th January, 10th May and 21st June 1967); S15 (27th March 1968); S16 (27th November 1968; 8th January, 14th and 21st May, and 18th June 1969); S17 (21st January 1970); S19 (2nd December 1971; 17th May and 1st June 1972); S20 (20th March 1973); S22 (13th May 1975).

²⁹ Translated by Claude Saunier and given the title *L’Aventure de la pensée occidentale* (Paris: Hachette, 1961).

published in 1945. Here, Russell had written that he considered Pythagoras one of the most important philosophers and the religious and mathematical aspects of his thought united³⁰.

However, Spadoni demonstrated that unlike the *History of Western Philosophy*, the *Wisdom of the West* was not written by Russell at all but by Paul Foulkes³¹, the house editor at Rathbone. While the *History of Western Philosophy* had not been well received by scholars³², the reviews being mostly critical, the *Wisdom of the West* fared better, a number of reviewers commenting on Russell's uniquely fascinating style³³. A few critics, however, noticed that there were inconsistencies between the views expressed in the two books but put this down to poor editing. However, one English critic, Huston Smith, suspected that Russell had not written the later book. It was a suspicion based on the language alone (Hudson Smith 1960 cited in Spadoni 363). And two reviews appeared in Australian periodicals that recognised that this was, in fact, the work of Foulkes. The first was by David Armstrong, the second by David Stove. The latter thought the book would be of no interest to philosophers and not sufficiently detailed for

³⁰ Although Russell devoted an entire chapter to Pythagoras, he also discussed the philosopher in relationship to Plato and Orphism elsewhere in the work. His interest in Pythagoras is also confirmed by a lengthy unpublished mss. on Pythagoras' attempts to deal with continuity and logical paradoxes, not included in the book, which was discovered by Giovanni Vianelli at the University of Bologna and published in its entirety in 2001 together with an introduction and commentary. See Vianelli, G. (2001). A Newly Discovered Text by Russell on Pythagoras and the History of Mathematics *Russel. The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies* NS 20: 5-30, 2001.

³¹ Foulkes prepared the text of each chapter and sent them to Russell who made changes and corrections. The latter's contribution being minor. On a number of occasions, from 1957, Russell tried to get the publisher to acknowledge the major role Foulkes had as a 'co-author'. Shortly before publication he threatened to make a public statement disavowing sole authorship, should not his name, on the title page, be followed by 'in collaboration with Paul Foulkes' (Letter Russell to Wolfgang Foges, Rathbone's managing editor, 7 April 1959 quoted in Spadoni 1986: 359). Although, in fact, this would have been an understatement. But Russell's ultimatum was quashed on copyright grounds and after publication 'he never disavowed authorship of the book' (Spadoni 1986: 366).

³² See, for example, the review by Isaiah Berlin who describes it as 'loose in texture', 'unsystematic', 'full of omissions and tantalising evasions', 'a chaotic amalgam of unfinished beginnings, dogmatic assertions unsupported by argument', 'interspersed with *obiter dicta*'... 'and "thin" interpretations' in which readers are 'left to fend for themselves', *Mind* 56 (22): 151-66, 1947. Collins goes through the second part of Russell's work in detail and is severely critical of his account of Catholic philosophy (Augustine through the Middle Ages) concluding that he came to the writing with 'many preconceptions but with little familiarity with the sources', that '[t]his accounts for his many errors, important omissions, and unbalanced general estimates', concluding that the book is 'not a reliable account of philosophy', Collins, J. *Bertrand Russell's A History of Western Philosophy: Book Two: I: Catholic Philosophy Franciscan Studies* 7 (2): 193-219, 1947. George Boas considered Russell 'never seems able to make up his mind whether he is writing a history or a polemic', that his method is 'anachronistic', that he 'misreads history' and that 'there are certain details of the exegesis of some of the philosophers which are questionable if not downright wrong'. In relation, specifically, to his interpretation of the Greeks, Boas writes that 'he repeats what a dozen other histories have already printed, based in the last analysis on the doxographical tradition which is little more than an uncritical acceptance of Aristotle. A knowledge of Cherniss's critical work on Aristotle's interpretation of his predecessors, the first volume of which appeared six years before *A History of Western Philosophy* was written, might have corrected this', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 8 (1): 117-23, 1947. Ratner considered the book showed 'all the painful evidences of selective readings both in primary and secondary sources', Ratner, J., *The Journal of Philosophy* 44 (2): 39-49, 1947.

³³ E.g. Nott (1959) and Schilpp (1959). Both cited in Spadoni 1986: 349, 362.

students of philosophy. More specifically, Stove noticed that the book bore the ‘unmistakable impress of Professor John Anderson, of the University of Sydney’, a dominant and outspoken thinker in Australia, under whom Foulkes had taken his first degree in philosophy. ‘Those who know’, he continued, ‘will detect this influence, both in matters of overall emphasis...and in a hundred points of detail’. Stove drew particular attention to the book’s detailed treatment of Plato’s dialogues. Anderson’s lectures to first-year students on the *Phaedo* were, he considered, reproduced here by Foulkes³⁴ and as Burnet put it, the *Phaedo* is ‘manifestly inspired by Pythagorean doctrine’ which Plato then re-worked (Burnet 1971: 83 n.1).

Conclusion

Jaeger considered that the reason why τέχνη was Plato’s ideal of knowledge was because it was exemplified in medicine, especially because the ‘art’ of healing had a practical aim in view (Jaeger 1943: 33-4). Aristotle noticed that Plato invariably proceeded in his reasoning by a form of induction in a manner akin to empiricism (Met. A6, 987a). In the *Phaedrus*, Plato describes medicine as something like oratory. It is, in fact, the first time he mentions Hippocrates. His point is that whether or not one practices it well or badly will depend on whether one practices it analytically. While the doctor must analyse the nature of the body in order to treat it with drugs, the philosopher must analyse the soul and treat it through speech (Phaed. 271). The distinction between a Hippocratic or Coan and Cnidian school of medicine is something of a nineteenth century fiction; a figment of learned imagination that was built up gradually based on Littré’s edition of the corpus. Russell’s view that the religious and mathematical aspects of Pythagoras’ thought are a unity, is false, as all we can safely conclude is that Pythagoras was seen by his followers as a sage. That is to say, as having something divine about him³⁵ (Stroumsa 2005). It is only with Philolaus that we find philosophical argument among the Pythagoreans and this is mostly in an ontological and epistemological form. Undoubtedly, this shift brought Pythagoreanism closer to the Socratic tradition. Pythagoreanism ‘in full Presocratic dress’ as Kirk puts it (1984: 328). But in the project of mathematicising science

³⁴ Although Anderson never published a book his main articles were published posthumously in *Studies in Empirical Philosophy* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962). Facsimiles of the text of the five lectures on *Phaedo* that Anderson delivered in 1933 are available on the University of Sydney website.

³⁵ In the later revival of religious Pythagoreanism, we find Philostratus depicting the perfect Pythagorean life personified in Apollonius as θεῖος ἀνὴρ (*Philostratus. Life of Apollonius of Tyana. The Epistles of Apollonius and the Treatise of Eusebius* (ed and trans) F.C. Conybeare. 2 Vols. Loeb Classical Library 16 and 17. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989; also see Bieler 1967).

they got scarcely beyond numerological fancy, despite the boldness and ingenuity of some of their thinking. But the idea at the heart of the project – if it is legitimate to regard it as the same idea as the Pythagoreans conceived – has now borne astonishingly abundant fruit.

Kirk 1984: 350

Iamblichus' *De Vita Pythagorae* was based on the VP of Porphyry and both were intended as alternatives to the Christian *vitae sanctorum*. That is to say, they were both hagiographical in focus. This reflects the fact that Pythagoreanism originally stood within a tradition that saw philosophy pre-eminently as a 'way of life'³⁶, a lifelong conversion and path towards the *telos* of contemplation. While it did not eschew reading and study, the kind of learning it embraced was not 'scientific' in the modern sense. This is entirely consistent with the Pythagorean trend within Neoplatonism, if we may call it that, and with the *Symposium* itself. Plato's dialogue endeavours to teach us how we may pass beyond our desire and love for that beauty which flourishes only to decay, to a yearning for the invisible, immaterial and eternal, which is, however dimly, inherent in ἔπος in all its manifestations.

Sigla

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³⁶ Inwood (2008: 322-52 and esp. 343 n.21) and others have rightly pointed out that Foucault's account of early Pythagoreanism is, in itself, grossly misleading. This is, to a large extent, because he relies on Porphyry and DL as evidence for early Pythagorean practice (see Foucault 1986: 60-61). Inwood is also correct in advising caution in seeing Pythagorean practices as ascetical in the later Christian monastic sense, as Foucault and others before him, notably Reitzenstein (1914), did. However, it is important to steer a middle course. Gregg comments astutely that, 'there is no reason to pose as mutually exclusive options' the idea that the *Vita Antonii* is based on biblical notions or conforms to a Graeco-Roman *encomium*. Someone 'steeped in the literature and philosophy of late antique culture... would have recognised [in Athanasius' text] the profile of the *sophos*' (1980: 5-6).

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