

HARRIS

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THE PYTHAGOREAN COUNSELS

: The Ko'ans of Pythagoras

This paper is an introduction to the study of the fragmentary materials from the 6 th c. B.C. Pythagorean monastery at Croton in southern Italy. Since the students at that school were sworn to secrecy, and furthermore the school was brutally eradicated by hostile forces afraid of the "new thinking", there has always been much of a mystery about Pythagoras and Pythagorean thought.

I have felt that if the "Symboulai" or Counsels were taken as ko'an like riddles which the Master proposed to his students for study, and a comparison were made to the Zen Buddhist tradition dating from the 12 th c. A.D., we might understand these difficult statements better.

My first step is to give a clear account of the fragments, with only as much scholarly detail as is necessary, and then consider the text for its wide variety of interpretative meanings. These Counsels have in the West been taken as odd, eccentric, tabu-ridden and even forgeries, so this is a first attempt to make sense of what are, after all, parts of a very ancient philosophical school

When Pythagoras returned from travels in the Near East, sometime after the middle of the 6 th century B.C., he found his home on Samos under the power of a local tyrant, possibly because of this, or for other reasons, he decided to move to the West, which then meant the lower part of Italy later called Magna Graecia. At Croton he founded a colony of about two hundred men and nearly twenty women, for the purpose of exploring Mind and Thought. The work there was conducted within the walls of a school, which assumed many of the characteristics of a monastery, since it involved regular lessons, tests of adequate comprehension of a body of essential principles, a regularized diet of food and thought. The work was internal and secret by definition.

At a certain time, neighboring people became alarmed by what was going on at the monastery, they arranged to have it raided and destroyed, therefore only a thin trickle of information about Pythagorean doctrine filtered through to later Greek times. Some of this later information came from defecting scholars of the original group, some has been traced to derivative thinkers, and some was the later figment of pure imagination. But Pythagorean thought did not die out in the ancient world, if later became fused with the popular cult of Orphism, and retained a place in the Hellenistic academic world Plato was deeply influenced by Pythagorean thinking although he hardly mentions it, while Aristotle gave a reasoned critique of what he understood the Pythagoreans to have added to Greek philosophy. But the genuine source material which issued from the Pythagorean school at Croton is pitifully thin.

Among the "remains" is a body of Sayings or Symbola, which purported to be statements from the mouth of Pythagoras himself. Many of them are cited as "he himself said that. . ." (autos ephe), while others resemble these in general tone and attitude. But these citations stem from authors writing well along in the Christian period, they were far removed from the world of 6 th century Greece. Philosophical critical acumen was of a low sort in the later period, which was largely given over to rote acceptance of scraps of information, or to rationalization of deep thought in simple terms. Yet from such sources we inherit a body of almost a hundred "Sayings" ascribed to Pythagoras himself or to senior members of his school. These Sayings, which are usually pithy and in a short sentence form, are varied in scope and style, most are initially difficult to interpret, and a very few cannot be interpreted at all.

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such sources we inherit a body of almost a hundred "Sayings" ascribed to Pythagoras himself or to senior members of his school. These Sayings, which are usually pithy and in a short sentence form, are varied in scope and style, most are initially difficult to interpret, and a very few cannot be interpreted at all.

For generations scholars have been non-plused by the Pythagorean Symbola. Kirk and Raven cite and translate a number of them, but without serious analysis, marking some as "nothing more than common ethical or religious reflections", while others are noted as "probably descended from primitive folk-taboo". Others "clearly concern ritual purity", yet some "seem to owe their origin to sympathetic magic"

Wheelwright notes that "each of them carries an ethical and occasionally a metaphysical meaning, which in some cases the reader can discern for himself, in other perhaps not." He translates some examples loosely, without much comment, and we are left to discern or not. (as he said), for ourselves. Even such a redoubtable scholar as Kathleen Freeman considers sifting for meaning "a thankless task", and decide that ".Perhaps it is wiser to leave them 'undemonstrable and unexplained'".

The problem is that Western scholars have looked back to the Pythagorean Symbola as historical precursors of what was to follow in the annals of Greek philosophy, and they have missed one important criterion : The School of Pythagoras at Croton was run like a monastery, He Himself (Pythagoras the Master) set the tone, the curriculum and individual lessons. His students were committed to learning with and through him, some were titled as Akousmaticoi (auditors), others were Mathematicoi (graduate students), and the instruction was directed through verbal rapport with the Master. The organization and purpose of this Croton Monastery is so similar to the monastic schools which were organized in China and then in Japan after the tenth century, that a general awareness of what the Zen scholars were about can help us to understand more about the very fragmented history of the Croton school.

First, the primary aim of both Greek and Japanese Zen schools was enlightenment. This could only be achieved in isolation from the pressures of society, in a removed society which was closely directed by someone who had learned a great deal about "knowing", along with a regulated diet of both food and thought. Instruction in ancient Japan was often performed in terms of koans, which the Master issued selectively to each student for meditation and explication after long study. It is the contention of this paper that the Pythagorean Symbola were in every sense koans, lesson assignments designed to raise the student's understanding bit by bit as he progressed on the road toward real knowledge. Since our knowledge of the Zen schools is rich and full, we can use it as an intellectual backdrop for the much less well understood school of the Pythagorean brotherhood at Croton.

Symbola and koans start with a puzzle-like statement, which the student wrestles with, improvises upon, and finally, after consulting with his Master, uses to expand his view of the world and his own perceptions. When the Master sees that the student has come to a raised level of mind, as is evidenced by his responses and even more by his questions, the koan has served its purpose, then new and harder ones can be devised to fit the student's needs. Seen in this light, the majority of the Symbola are excellent koan-like lessons for individual, private learning. They are puzzles for the student's growing intelligence, and when seen in this light there is no reason that they should confuse us in any way. A few Symbola are still impossible to understand, but this may be the result of two thousand years of academic transmission without understanding them at all; or it may be that, since we are in fact all students in the art of becoming enlightened, we have not ready for the level of the lesson at hand.

In this paper, the full list of the 96 Symbola will be given in English translation, rather than the selections common to most textbooks, so that we can have the complete material at hand. Some of the sayings are repeated in

a slightly different wording, these too have been given in the interest of completeness. In an ensuing section some of the Symbola will be selected for commentary, to make clear the wide range of the experience which students at the Croton academy must have gone through. Surprisingly some of the Symbola are still alive and quite pertinent to problems which we still face.

I hope that another scholar with interest in the Zen tradition, with compare these materials with specific documents from the 12th c. Zen period of study with Pythagorean items, in the hope that comparative treatment of the two educational systems may shed light on the very fragmentary and misunderstood Pythagorean studies. Similarities between the Zen and Pythagorean school systems probably stem from the very fact of humanness and common experience, although there are glimpses of sources in ancient India which may have furnished both the Orient and Hellas with similar elements in their separate ways of thinking.

THE NAME OF THE COLLECTION : Symbola or Counsels

No one is sure when the term Symbola was first applied to this collection of Pythagorean materials. These Pythagorean sayings are usually called Akousmata, from the verb akouo "hear; listen", or Symbola. The first term is entirely understandable, since akouo is often used for "hearing a lecturer", almost to the degree of "taking a course". But the other term Symbola is less comprehensible. In Greek the word sum-bolon (coming from ballo) always speaks of something "put together", whether it is a business agreement, the legal "seal" of a signet ring, a receipt, or any other set of conditions in which one this is joined with another. But this has little meaning when used for the Pythagorean taught doctrines.

One of the Sayings provides a clue to what I believe was the original title as named in the Doric Dialect within the Pythagorean school. I am concerned with the Greek verb: sym-bouleuo, as in:

"Counsel (symbouleue) only what is good for him being counseled, since counsel (boule) is holy".

Croton was in a South Italian area where Doric Greek was been spoken. Croton had been founded about 700 B.C. by a colony of Achaeans, who were Doric speaking Peloponnesians without question. Many of the students, men and women, are recorded by place of origin, and there is a preponderance of Doric speakers by place of origin. Now in the Doric dialect, the Attic vowel -ou- is regularly - pronounced -w-, and attested examples of Doric writing regularly have bwleuo for Att. bouleuo, just as they have bolomai for Att. boulomai and bola for Att. boule. We know that the Pythagorean studies were done in a completely oral form, they were secret and could be leaked to the outside world on authentic (Doric speaking) lips, so it seems reasonable to assume that in the words which insiders used to describe to outsiders the "Words of the Master", they would have used the Doric term symbwlla. At a later date, Atticistic commentators would have heard this as symbola, a simple phonetic alteration from a long vowel to a short one in the interests of connecting with an established Attic word, symbolon "agreements, etc." Modern historical linguists know the sound laws of the dialects better, and can retrace -o- to -ou- in this word, but there is no reason to think that the pitiful linguistics of Plato's generation would have been thought of following this path.

Therefore, it is suggested that the word Symbola be reinterpreted as symbola, reconnected with the verb symbouleuo "counsel, advise", and reoriented to the very important Fragment :

"counsel (symbouleue) what is best for the one being counseled, for counsel (boule) is holy.

But of course the Pythagorean materials have been run through the Attic sieve, and we may well want to "restore" the title in a Doric form, from which we will have a better understanding of what the title means, what the Sayings were originally understood to do, and how we are to approach this collection of unusual materials. From this point on we will refer to the Pythagorean Symbola as "Counsels"

(An academic aside concerning the vocalization of the Greek dialects, specifically an Attic transmutation of a South Italian Doric word. First we should examine the word *boule* and its derivatives in terms of the Greek dialects: Attic *bouleuo* should turn up in Dor. as *bwleuo*, that is Dor. omega would correspond to Att. -ou- in such a configuration. This is clear and factual. (Now what can the L-S entry under *boule* mean: Dor. *bwlla*, Decr. Byz. ap. D.". This must be the *Decretum Byzantinum apud D(emosthenes)*" since D. is their regular abbr. for him. But what is clear is this: that Att. *boul-euo* = Aeol. *boll* = Dor. *bwl-*.)

In the light of the above, these sayings should clearly be called Counsels. The master/teacher has not only intellectual responsibility for his students, but personal responsibility as well. Counsel involves a special relationship between master and student, the master must at all time be aware of that will ultimately harm as well as benefit the student... Since the learning experience in a monastic type learning-center like that of Pythagoras is done on a personal basis, we can have the image of the eager students, whether *Akousmaticoi* or *Mathematicoi*, auditors or graduate students, and beside these, we are aware of a powerful figure, one *autos*, who speaks statements worthy of meditation. So between the Master and the Disciples exists the basis for Counseling and it should be no surprise that the Sayings were called Counsels.

The following translation is from the citations from the Greek sources: Diels-Kranz 5 ed. vol 2 under *Pythagoristae*. The order is as listed in DK, based on the origin of the quotations from ancient sources, hence there is no thematic order at all, as compared with the commented treatment which follows. The reason for listing the quotations this way is to present the raw material, as it were, by itself. One can easily see why many commentators have felt that this list of sayings is either incomprehensible or mere tabu of the organization. I suggest reading the plain text carefully first, then going to my commentary to see if it sheds light on the shadows which embrace the ruined walls of the Pythagorean Monastery at Croton.

1) "Thunder exists, as the Pythagoreans say, for the purpose of threatening those in the the Underworld, so that they may be frightened". Aristotle, D. 462-37

2) " He (. Pythagoras) said certain things in a mystical manner... e.g. the sea is "a tear", the bears "the hands of Rhea, the Pleiades "the lyre of the Muses, the planets "the hound of Persephone, and the sound that arises when the bronze (cymbal) is struck is "the voice of a spirit threatened by the bronze. Porphyrius. D.462-40

3) 'He said that the holiest thing of all was the leaf of the plant "malache". Aelian D.463-4

4) The wisest thing of all is number (*arithmos*), and second he who puts names on things (actually *pragmasi*).Aelian,D.462-5.

5) He explained earthquake as nothing else than assembly of the dead. Aelian, D. 463-6

6).... and he used to say that Iris (rainbow) is the light of the sun, Aelian, D.463-7

7) and the echo which resounds in mens' ears is the voice of the Greater Ones (gods). Aelian, D. 463-8

8) "According to Aristotle he (Pythagoras) said to avoid beans, since they are similar to genitals, and to the gates of Hell... (lacuna: ? eat only?) what is ungenerative. [This is either because this destroys, or is like the nature of the whole, or because it is oligarchical, since they choose by lot with it.] Diogenes Laertius, D. 463-9

9)... and not to pick up what has fallen [so one does get used to eating guttously, or because it is the end of something. And Aristophanes says in his play The Heroes " do not taste what falls under the tale".]Diogenes Laertius, D. 463-12

10)... and do not lay hands on a white rooster, since it is holy to Moon (meis), and a suppliant. [This is one of the good things, he is holy to Moon, and signals the time; if white it is of good nature, if black of bad.] Diogenes Laertius, D. 463-16

11) And do not lay hands on such fish as are holy [for these are not to be handled by gods or men, just as by freemen and slaves]. Diogenes Laertius, D. 463-19.

12) Do not break a loaf [because men of ancient times used to pass around a whole loaf among friends, just as the barbarians do nowadays., nor for a person who brings together, to take apart. Some do (this) because of the judgment in Hell, others out of cowardice in battle.. Diogenes Laertius, D. 462-21

13) Of solid (geometric) forms the fairest is the ball, of plane forms, the fairest is the circle. Diogenes Laertius, D.463-24

14) Age is continually lessening, and it is also growth and youth. Diogenes Laertius, D. 463-25

15) Health is the retention of form, disease is the loss of it. Diogenes Laertius, D. 463.26

16) Of salt, it is right to set it out (as at dinner) as a reminder of the just, for salt preserves what it contacts, and is produced by the cleansing actions of sun and sea. Diogenes Laertius, D. 463-27

Iamblichus D. 463-33 speaking of the Acousmata "which are to be received as such without discussion (logos), but retained and preserved", says "they are divided into three classes: 1) What a given thing signifies (semainei), 2)what it IS, and 3)what it is necessary to do or refrain from doing."

In the first classification, of what things signify, are listed a variety of questions and answers:

17) What are the Isles of the Blessed? Sun and Moon. Iamblichus D. 464-6

18) What is the oracle at Delphi? The tetractys, which exists in the harmony of the Planets (Seirenes or "twinklers").Iamblichus, D. 464 -7
In the second class of what Is, we find:

19) What is wisest? First number, then names. Iamblichus, D. 464-8

20) What is the wisest of human things (ta par hemin)? Medical art. Iamblichus, D. 464 -8

21) What is fairest? Harmony. Iamblichus D. 464 -9

22) What is strongest? Intelligence (gnome). Iamblichus, D. 464 -10

23) What is best? Happiness. Iamblichus, D. 464-10

24) [What is the truest thing ever said? That men are evil. Iamblichus, D. 464-11

And in the third class of what is and is not to be done are these:

- 25) One must procreate children, [since one should leave behind him persons who will serve God]. Iamblichus, D. 464-22
- 26) One must put on the right shoe first. Iamblichus, D. 464-23
- 27) One must not follow the people's major highways. Iamblichus, D. 464-23
- 28) One must not dip one's hand into the lustral vessel., or wash in the public bath.[It is not clear in these cases if the participants do become cleansed.] Iamblichus, D. 464-24
- 29) Do not participate in lifting up a load, but you can help getting it down. [This is not for the sake of avoiding labor.] Iamblichus, D. 464-25
- 30) Do not associate with a woman who has gold for the purpose of begetting children. Iamblichus, 464-26
- 31) Do not speak without light. Iamblichus, D. 464-27
- 32) Pour a libation to the gods over the "ear" of the cup, for the sake of a good omen (oionos) so that one cannot drink from it (the "ear" or mouth of the vessel). Iamblichus, D. 464-28
- 33) Do not have the figure of a deity on your ring [lest it get dirty in use]. Rather have a statue of the deity, and keep it in your house.
- 34) Do not chase after your wife, for she is a holy suppliant. We should (rather) lead her from the hearth, and let the "taking" of her be on the right side. Iamblichus, D. 464-30. Aristotle amplified this 9465-15 ff. with a remark about this being an ancient form of law designed to protect women from their husbands, citing this material with the comment that "in this way least harm will be seen to result". D. 465-15 ff.
- 35) Do not (sacrifice) a white rooster, which is suppliant and holy to Moon, and also signals the time. Iamblichus, D. 464 -31
- 36) Counsel nothing but the best for him who is being counseled, for counsel is holy. Iamblichus, D. 464-32
- 37) Work is good, but leisure (hedonai) is in every way evil.[One must chastise those coming to chastisement.]
- 38) One must sacrifice barefoot, and address the holy images (or come forth to the holy places). Iamblichus, D. 464-35
- 39) One must not turn out of this way to a temple; one must not make God a side-issue. Iamblichus, D. 464-35
- 40) [To die standing firm and receiving wounds on the front of the body is good. the reverse is bad.] Iamblichus, D. 464-36
- 41) The soul of a man does not proceed to single-simple living creatures, with whom it is permissible to make sacrifice; and for this reason one can eat of such sacrificed animals, but of no other. Iamblichus, D. 464-37
Anaximandros of Miletus wrote a digest of Pythagorean sayings, (his explanations are pedestrian and pseudo-logical) (Suidas, 465-19), among which are:
- 42) Do not step over a yoke. Suidas, D. 465-23
- 43) Do not stir the fire with a dagger. Suidas, D. 465-23
- 44) Do not eat from a whole loaf. Suidas, D. 465-24
Diogenes Laertius continues with Anaximandran quotations, as does Suidas:
- 45) Do not pluck from a wreath. Diogenes Laertius, D. 465-28

- 46) Eat not the heart. Diogenes Laertius, D. 465-29
- 47) Do not sit on a choinix (gallon pail).Diogenes Laertius, D. 465-30
- 48) When traveling away from home, do not be turning about. Diogenes Laertius, D. 465-31
- 49) Do not walk on the public highways. Diogenes Laertius, D. 465-32
- 50) Do not receive swallows in your house. Diogenes Laertius, D. 466-2
- 51) Working with others lifting, you may set down a load, but do not lift it up with them. Diogenes Laertius, D. 466-3
- 52) Do not carry images of deities on rings. Diogenes Laertius, D. 466-5
- 53) Make sacrifices to the gods over the "ears" of the cups. Diogenes Laertius, D. 466-7
- 54) It is not right to eat generation, growth, beginning or end, nor that from which the first development (hypothesis) comes. This includes loins, testicles, genitals, brain, head and feet. Diogenes Laertius, D. 466-9
- 55) One must refrain from beans as from human flesh. Diogenes Laertius, D. 466-12
- 56) He urged refraining from metra, triglis and akalephe, as well as from most other sea creatures. Diogenes Laertius, D. 466-13
Now Iamblichus gives (466 -15 ff) as abbreviated list of most of the above items, but with slightly different wording, as follows:
- 57) Going away to a holy temple, kneel down, and the meanwhile neither think nor do anything pertaining to one's regular life. Iamblichus, D. 466-16
- 58) One must not go to a temple as side-issue, nor fall right down on his knees, not even if he happens to be passing the very doors of the holy place. Iamblichus, D. 466-16
- 59) Sacrifice and kneel barefoot. Iamblichus, D. 466-18
- 60) Disinclining from public roads, walk the untrodden (paths).Iamblichus, D. 466-17
- 61) Avoid (eating) melanouros or " the fish blacktail", for it belongs to the Earth Deities. Iamblichus, D. 466-19
- 62) Control your tongue above all else when following the Gods. Iamblichus, 466-20
- 63) When the winds blow, kneel down to Echo. Iamblichus, 466-21
- 64) DO not stir the fire with a dagger. Iamblichus, D. 466-21
- 65) Always turn the vinegar cruet away from yourself. Iamblichus, D. 466-22
- 66) Help a man lifting up a load, do not help him lifting it down. Iamblichus, D. 466-22
- 67) Put the right foot into the shoe first, for footwashing, do left first. Iamblichus D. 466-23
- 68) Speak not without light about Pythagorean matters. Iamblichus, D. 466-24
- 69) Cross not a yoke-beam. Iamblichus, D. 466-25
- 70) Traveling away from your home, do not turn yourself around, for the Furies (erinnues) follow. Iamblichus, 466-25

- 71) Do not urinate turning toward the sun. Iamblichus, D. 466-26
- 72) Do not wipe your bottom with a stick. Iamblichus, D. 466-25
- 73) Keep a cock but do not sacrifice it. Iamblichus, D. 466-27
- 74) Do not sit on a choinix (gallon bucket). Iamblichus, D. 466-28
- 76) Raise not an animal which has hooked claws. Iamblichus, 466-28
- 77) Do not split up on a road. Iamblichus, D. 466-28
- 78) Receive swallows not in your house. Iamblichus, D. 466-29
- 79) Do not wear a ring. Iamblichus, D. 466-29
- 80) Engrave not the figure of a deity on your ring. Iamblichus, D. 466-29
- 81) Do not look at yourself in a mirror by candlelight. Iamblichus, D. 466-30
- 82) Fail not to believe any amazing things about deities or ideas about the theic. Iamblichus, D. 466-30
- 83) Be not held by uncontrollable laughter. Iamblichus, D. 466-31
- 84) Do not cut your nails at a sacrificial ritual. Iamblichus, D. 466-32
- 85) Do not hold out your right hand to every person readily. Iamblichus, D. 466-32
- 86) Rising up from bed, roll up the bedclothes and smoothe out the place. Iamblichus, D. 466-32
- 87) Gnaw not the heart. Iamblichus, D. 466-33
- 88) Eat not the brain. Iamblichus, D. 466-34
- 89) Look with disgust at (lit. spit upon) your hair-cuttings and fingernail clippings. Iamblichus, D. 466-34
- 90) Do not accept the erythinos (a hermaphrodite fish). Iamblichus, D. 466-35
- 91) Efface the mark of the pot from the ashes. Iamblichus, D. 466-35
- 92) Be not close to a woman who has gold for the purposes of child-begetting. Iamblichus, D. 466-35
- 93) Give special honor to the shape and motion of the " shape and tri-obol (coin)". Iamblichus, D. 466-36 [The text is hopelessly corrupt, tou schema looks like a scribal repetition; perhaps tribolos, "spiked chestnut" is meant.]
- 94) Keep away from beans. Iamblichus, D. 466-37
- 95) Grow the plant "moloche" but do not eat it. Iamblichus, D. 466-38. Cf. 3) for spelling.
- 96) Restrain yourself from (eating) things which have life. Iamblichus, D. 466-39

TEXT WITH COMMENTARY

Now we can turn to examine the Counsels (Symboulai) with care, in a

thematically rearranged order, with a new and detailed commentary. I have had these Counsels in my mind for several decades, and found that they had a way of "revealing themselves" one at a time over the years. I record the history of my unforced discovering of inner meaning and spiritual values, as evidence of a way which I believe the Master must have intended his students to follow. If some of my points seem forced, put them on the shelf for future consideration, thinking of the slow pace of the classic Zen Ko'ans of the early period and the way they could later explode into understanding.

I: ON ENLIGHTENMENT

The first group, which is most interesting from a philosophical and humanistic point of view, is concerned with problems affecting enlightenment and the art of knowing, the way by which men come to know themselves and the world around them. Confining ourselves to the Symbola which concern man's way of viewing the world, we find these examples :

4) The wisest thing of all is number (arithmos), and second he who puts names on things (pragmasi). Aelian, D. 462-5.

What is most startling about this statement is the remote time in which it was formulated. When Lord Kelvin said that only when we can put numbers onto things, do we begin to know something about them, he was working in a long line of researchers from Galileo to Cavendish, who understood the importance of numbers for scientific thought.. Modern developments from Cybernetics to computer theory, and on the other hand in the genetics coding of life forms, have gone even further in making us aware of the primacy of number over word-concept. One could almost say that God, or the Nature of the Universe, thinks in numbers, which notion probably would not have surprised Pythagoras at all.

62) Control your tongue above all else when following the Gods. (Iamblichus, 466-20)

Simplicity is required for the highest matters, although people from time immemorial have discoursed at length on theology. One thinks of the endless Indian Buddhist disquisitions, which so confused and displease the 12th c. Zen masters in Japan. Reducing words, they tried to clear out the web of needless discourse.

68) Speak not without light about Pythagorean matters. (Iamblichus, D. 466-24)

31) Do not speak without light. (Iamblichus, D. 464-27)

This follows indirectly from the caution of 4).about the use of words. The earlier Greeks in general had not overloaded their thought with verbal baggage, which distinguishes their needs from the 12th C. Zen masters who were trying to get clear of centuries of verbal overlay stemming from China and India. Each age has its own, special impediments on the road to inquiry.

60) Disinclining from public roads, walk the untrodden (paths). (Iamblichus, D. 466-17).

26) One must not follow the people's major highways. (Iamblichus, D. 464-23)

49) Do not walk on the public highways. (Diogenes Laertius, D. 465-32)

The Greeks were new to the role of heavy socialization of masses of men and women, which had proved so successful from the eighth millennium B.C. in India, Egypt and the Near East. Possibly because of their neophyte socialization, they could accept working in states (poleis), while being aware of the danger of too much social cloning, which is eventually the sure damper to inventive genius. Living socially, but distrusting the processes of socialization, the Greek trod his own private highways, and this led him to

supremacy in art, literature, science and philosophy. Thoughtful moderns like Robert Frost have repeatedly spoken about the "other roads", an ancient caution in a new setting.

One thinks of Frost's choice of the road less traveled, and the worth of that choice. In physics the "highway" of ether-theory was trod by everybody, until a recalcitrant few went on another path. Humans are in many ways herd animals, and this can be an impediment to progress.

70) Traveling away from your home, do not turn yourself around for the Furies (Erinnyes) follow. (Iamblichus, D.466-25)

Whether "home" is a place on the map, or a point in our past, the inveterate act of repeatedly looking back destroys not only awareness of the present but also consideration of the future. One might almost say that an undue "looking back" constitutes the core of neurosis, and causes the kind of calcification of the mind which Lot's wife physically symbolizes. In a typical situation, Orpheus through his artistic imagination created what appeared to be a coherent way of "looking back", so that he believed his dead wife was actually with him, until he finally "looked back" in real vision to find she was not there at all. We all know this personally in our personal quandaries about having turned off the lights and locked the door, as we drive down the highway on a vacation, after-thinking is a human trait, but one which can easily become compulsive.

81) Do not look at yourself in a mirror by candlelight. (Iamblichus, D. 466-30)

Since the invention of silvered glass in the 17th century, mirrors have become so good as to fool the eye, we even use the phrase "mirror-image", although mirrors reverse the right and left side of our faces and make writing unintelligible. But in the Hellenic world, mirrors were made of polished brass, which accounts for St. Paul's odd phrase about knowing yourself "through a glass darkly", where "glass" is the venerable King James Version's "modernization". Now imagine looking at yourself in a brass mirror by the light of a Greco-Roman olive-oil lamp, which is far darker and smokier than a candle, and now ask yourself what you really see. Beyond the reflected image is the retinal impression of the surface of a person, absorbing and reflecting certain wavelengths of light and filtering the image through a complex human brain-field, which in turn is modified in its perception by experience, social modes, and habit. The very process of looking at oneself is fraught with perceptual dangers, and if one really wants to see himself fully and behold his real self, there will be insurmountable problems with the mirrored image. The novice Pythagorean monk in the sixth century B.C. could drive himself to desperation wondering how he could ever really perceive himself. Here we see the value of this koan, a deep puzzle worthy of the great Socratic phrase: Know Thyself. It was this lifelong problem of self-knowing that Socrates was talking about, not a simple distinction between men and gods, as Herodotus and generations of Classical scholars have maintained. Reading this "case", one sees that the West has not been unaware of some of the larger problems concerned with self-knowledge, problems which the East continued to try to solve.

85) Do not hold out your right hand to every person readily. (Iamblichus, D. 466-32)

Automatic social behavior, even if friendly, is likely to be thoughtless. In a world which is often thoughtless, thoughtlessness must be monitored even in minor situations. Thoughtless persons lose the capacity for careful thinking.

83) Be not held by uncontrollable laughter. (Iamblichus, D. 466-31)

Both automatic goodwill and automatic risibility blind the mind to watchfulness, which is probably why the Zen man and the Karate master seem at times so removed and cautious. Too much on the outside is likely to indicate too little on the inside; one must balance Yin and Yang.

There may also be a notion of breath being somehow aligned with "Soul". Breathing out overly in laughter could be felt to be analogous to "breathing out your soul" or dying. And in some very few cases hysterical laughter may precede a stroke.....

77) Do not split up on a road. (Iamblichus, D. 466-38)

This is strange indeed, if we are speaking of a real roadway, but if we are thinking in larger terms, the Road of Life is a road we cannot get off, any more than we can get on it. Or the pathway of a thought.... we must not split and divide, wobble and hesitate. Just go right on through, as in the Zen statement: "When you sit, sit....when you walk, just walk, do not wobble."

12) Do not break a loaf [because men of ancient times used to pass around a whole loaf among friends, just as the barbarians do nowadays.] [Nor for a person who brings together, to take apart. Some do (this) because of the judgment in Hell, others out of cowardice in battle.] (Diogenes Laertius, D. 462-21)

[The bracketed section is certainly a late interpolated interpretation, but retained for one interesting part which is discussed below.] The concept of "the whole" pervades Greek thought, in its science and its philosophy, and is by no means absent from the contemporary world. Dividing up usually means losing some of the parts, some of the essence. The whole is more than its parts, that is what the concept of synergy means. Synergy applies to thought processes as well as to the usual examples of the alloying of metals in metallurgical engineering.. In these passages, we find heroic thinkers struggling to conceptualize the idea of "the whole", using the homely example of a round wheel of bread from the bakery as a model.

It is curious to note the argument (referred to above in the above passage), which finds today's "outsiders men" doing what yesterday's city dwellers formerly did, this is a perfect parallel to Thucydides' discussion a century later of "bearing weapons" (siderofores) among the countryfolk of his own time. The idea of cultural diffusion from city to countryside with a specific time lag, something our sociologists might think they invented, was obviously a commonplace Greek perception.

22) What is strongest? Intelligence (gnome). (Iamblichus, D. 464 -10)

As we near the close of this century, we recognize the supreme role of Intelligence, which in our daily dealings we are likely to call Software, or Artificial Intelligence, or Pattern Recognition. Our predecessors before the middle of the century thought the strongest force was to be found in Production, Manpower and "Hardware". No further commentary is needed in this example for people now living in the Age of the Computers!

II: PERCEPTION AND THE WORLD AROUND US

A second group of Symbola deals with things occurring in the real world for which people need some degree of explanation. One must remember that many of the things we take as common knowledge must have been terribly difficult for the ancients to grasp. For some things, concepts and even descriptive words were entirely lacking. A Greek puzzling statement or koan could be used for outlining a concept, for which verbal terms would be found later. This is the inverse of many 12 c. A.D. Japanese koans, which are designed to strip the overage of wording away from central perceptual and spiritual concepts, so that the basic thought may emerge. The use of the koan in Greece is similar as a teaching and thinking device, but the aim is as different as the fifteen hundred years which separate the Greek and medieval Japanese cultures.

4) The wisest thing of all is number (arithmon), and second he who puts

names on things (pragmasi). (Aelian,D.462-5).

19)What is wisest? First number, then names. (Iamblichus, D. 464-8)

We have spoken above about "number"; we should consider the role of the "names" here. Perhaps the most characteristic feature of "naming" is that although there is much inventiveness and intuition in fashioning a name, as soon as this becomes an item of regularized vocabulary, it is treated as a cipher or character, thus losing a great deal of the imagination which generated it. Hence the ever new search for newness in words and wording. For thinkers, words can be traps, this was the experience of the time of the experiments of the Mumonkan, whose "barrier where there is no gateway" was consistently blocked by words. Marshall MacLuhan told the English-speaking public about the dangers of a pure Print-Culture in the 1960's, and we still labor under those same problems. The "New Illiteracy" may in a strange way have some healthy intuitions, while in the new Computer World, words have already started to disappear, or become technical catch-phrases to be used in illustrative manuals.. Perhaps God thinks more like a computer than we like to imagine, somewhat in the mathematical mode which Pythagoras foresaw.

21)What is fairest? Harmony. (Iamblichus D. 464 -9)

18)What is the oracle at Delphi? The tetractys, which exists in the harmony of the Planets (Seirenes or "twinklers"). (Iamblichus, D. 464 -7)

There has been much comment since ancient times about the Music of the Spheres, which was at times assumed to be a harmonic musical "chord" of some sort, not unlike the Buddhist's om-like "rtu sound" of the turning world.. The fact of the purely mathematical harmony of our solar system is, easy to overlook but Kepler saw the beauty of planetary harmony as a mathematical fact with a strongly spiritual cast. Looking back we can see his discovery as inevitable, considering how much mathematical thinking his world was heir to, quite aside from its own Renaissance inventiveness. But that Pythagoras should have foreseen this harmonic sequence is amazing. The word Seirenes is a noun from the rare verb seiriazw "to twinkle", which establishes a connection with planetary brightness of light,. rather than sound.

The Oracle at Delphi aspired to the highest knowledge since it could grasp the most recondite data then imaginable. [The tetractys as a mathematical figure seems less pertinent, it's triangular shape with rising rows of three, two and then one dot does have interesting numerical properties, but none that enters into planetary astronomy or seem particularly appropriate here. Since the tetractys was famous as a Pythagorean figure of wisdom, it was probably interpolated by a well-wishing scribe into this saying.].

29) Do not participate in lifting up a load, but you can help getting it down. [This is not for the sake of avoiding labor.] (Iamblichus, D. 464-25)

66) Help a man lifting up a load, do not help him lifting it down. (Iamblichus, D. 466-22)

51) Working with others lifting, you may set down a load, but do not lift it up with them. (Diogenes Laertius, 466-3)

In the three statements above, we are dealing with a definition of gravity, a concept which had never been properly formulated in the Greek world. Without a word, gravity could not be described, and the Greek noun barutes, which should have meant Gravity, is used rarely, and only in engineering situations, to mean "weight, ponderousness". But if a student were to consider the meaning of these three koans carefully he would have to notice that there is a difference of effort required to lift up and let down a weight. A rock three men can barely get up onto an ox-cart, one man can tumble off. The difference between the forces required to get the rock up, as compared with what is required to get it down, in a very rough way indicate the direction, if not the actual amount, of gravitational pull. Without a regular

doctrine of gravitational theory to aid us, or even a word for force, most of us today would fumble for a long time before we could enunciate what this koan demanded of its Pythagorean recipient. This seems a particularly brilliant lesson to put to a student, since it works up from a base of something unknown, yet involves some sense of a force which each person and every technology confronts every day. Without isolating such basic phenomena in a firm conceptual framework, there can be no science at all. Here we are at the very beginning!

6)... and he used to say that Iris (rainbow) is the light of the sun. (Porphyry D.463-8.; Aelian, D.463-7)

To us this will seem obvious, but it was not until well into the 17 th. century that the process of refraction of sunlight into the bands of the spectrum was understood at all.. This puzzle shows that the student was intended to figure out where the phenomenon called rainbow came from. The Latin term arcus pluvius tells us is what it looks like, and even when it occurs, but tells us nothing about its origin or what its nature really is.

43) Do not stir the fire with a dagger. (Suidas, D. 465-23, also 64). (Iamblichus, D. 466-21)

The Greeks were well aware of the peculiar martensitic qualities of certain types of steel with about a half percent of carbon and no more, which when heated and plunged into cold water, attained a remarkable hardness. Homer knows the whole process, which he refers to explicitly in comparison with the heating cycle of copper based alloys. (Odyssey 9,391-3). It was this heat-treatability which made steel different from cast iron, and superior to bronze as a material for tools. This Pythagorean puzzle focuses on the loss of hardness in a dagger (machaira) when reheated if used as a fire-poker. Heat treating of metals is so common now that we might fail to appreciate the mystery of the process when first seen. Understanding how a soft material by agency of heat and cooling becomes metamorphosed into an intensely hard material is somewhat of a mystery, and can only be explained by a doctrine involving atomic theory, molecular motion with heat, and freezing of this motion with the internally locked up stresses which we call "hardness". There is more here than meets the eye, which is what the novice was intended to intuit somehow.

More simply, the proportion "soft: heat: hard" identifies fire as a quasi-catalytic process, which changes the nature of Ferrum, Fe. This would lead eventually to a recognition of energy as a component of mass, but at the end of a long and tortuous trail.

86) Rising up from bed, roll up the bedclothes and smoothe out the place. (Iamblichus, D. 466-32)

91) Efface the mark of the pot from the ashes. (Iamblichus, D. 466-35)

In the sayings in the above group, we have two things to consider: What is this "form" which remains when the person rises from his bed, what is this "shape of the pot" left in the ashes? The figure of these two "negative forms" is directly dependent on the positive form which made them, but if one were attentive to the widespread technique of mould-making used for the casting of metal objects since the third millennium B.C., one could reverse the sequence and imagine that the form in the bed somehow was responsible for the man's shape, and the ash-shape for the pot. Of course this is just imagination, but from such dreaming can emerge engaging systems, like Plato's Theory of Ideas, which was already academically defunct in Aristotle's time. But it had remarkable offshoots later, not the least of which is the modern discipline of genetics, which incorporates mathematical coding, reaching as near to pure idea as one can get, in a complex chemically operative matrix. "Idea" is thus masterplan for a living being, although we still think of genetic materials as something which we made, whereas it is quite the opposite, they made us.. Part of an ability to understand genetic coding comes from our familiarity with the Platonic and the Pythagorean

heritage, which strained forward to formulate the ideal concept of "ideas". At an early stage of thinking, a valuable lesson could be found in the possibly reciprocal relationship between the pot and the ashes around it.

III: MYSTERIES AND THE SOUL

The next entries speak about loss of something ineffable, which in ancient times could not be exactly defined. We can dismiss the breathing out of carbon-dioxidized air from the mouth and methane from the intestinal tract as phenomena incidental to living, but to the ancient mind these gaseous emissions seemed related to breathing out life, or the very soul. Almost all of the words which are used for life and soul are drawn from a gaseous background: Gr. thumos" beside Lat. fumus, Gr. anemos vis-a-vis Lat. anima, the Lat. idiom ebullire animam "die", Skt. atman, at-:.

15) Health is the retention of form, disease is the loss of it. (Diogenes Laertius, D. 463.26)

This is apparent on an external level, a sick person loses weight, loses color. But on a deeper level, he loses the operation of his normal immunity system, he loses the configuration of his blood. If "form" is the normal state of being which homeostasis tries to perpetuate, then sickness is a distortion of loss of it.

83) Be not held by uncontrollable laughter. (Iamblichus, D. 466-31)

The breathing out of air presages breathing out of soul, hence possibly death. Koan # 83 spoke to this before.

94) Keep away from beans. (Iamblichus, D. 466-37.)

55) One must refrain from beans [as from human flesh]. Diogenes Laertius,(D. 466-12). The bracketed words are probably a gloss which derives from later interpretations of the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis.

Beans, which everywhere produce gas which emanate from the anus, also produce "wind" of a sort.... Could this be a loss of "spirit"? Why is "soul" trying to escape? Refraining from beans and other gas-making foods, you avoid the problem.

65) Always turn the vinegar cruet away from yourself. (Iamblichus, D. 466-22)

Everyone has a natural trait of sniffing at a cruet, even research chemists will often whiff a reagent to check its identity roughly. But this is obviously dangerous, you choke up on vinegar's 2 perc. acetic acid fumes, so think more carefully about testing things which are unknown. What you think about and identify deductively, these things represent useful knowledge, what you "sniff" or casually inspect through the sense can do you harm. And beyond that, you still know nothing about its nature, other than its odor. You can "sniff" bitter, or pungent, and a few other things, but you cannot really sniff "acetic acid", only an odor.

20)What is the wisest of human things (the things with us)? Medical art. (Iamblichus, D. 464 -8)

Loss of "form" or identity is also seen as occurring when the shape of the body is "retained" in the bedclothes, or the pot's impression is "removed" into the fire ashes. Even shorne hair and fingernail clippings are seen as "things removed" detrimentally from the body, for example:.

89) Look with disgust at (literally". spit upon") your hair-cuttings and fingernail clippings. (Iamblichus, 466-34)

Sniffing the acetic whiff which emanates from the vinegar bottle is the exact opposite of this shearing-off process, it is taking into the body something from outside which does not belong there, and thus potentially dangerous not only as a strong odor, but because of its natural "outsideness". In short, all outgoing things (Yin), which proceed out from the body, were seen as losses, detriments, and even finally causes of death. Laughing, belching, farting, and even being excessively demonstrative were not medically advisable; from a different point of view, these outward-going acts tended to diminish concentration on things of the mind, which was always the center of Pythagorean meditation.

We still have much to explain about the disappearance of that vivifying "something" which we call "soul" when we die. We know from careful measurements of the dying, that "soul" has no weight. Some maintain it has no more reality than the kinetic motion of an operating piece of machinery, other compare it to the "program" of a computer which is turned off without being "saved". We have more possibilities but not many more answers than the Pythagoreans, who felt that soul could evaporate by any outward going (Yin) action or motion; but they also felt that soul was not really lost, but was a constant which returned to other live beings.

12) Do not break a loaf [because men of ancient times used to pass around a whole loaf among friends, just as the barbarians do nowadays. Nor for a person who brings together, to take apart. Some do (this) because of the judgment in Hell, others out of cowardice in battle.. (Diogenes Laertius, D. 462-21)

77) Do not split up on a road. (Iamblichus, D. 466-28)

9)... and not to pick up what has fallen [so one does get used to eating guttonously, or because it is the end of something. And Aristophanes says in his play The Heroes " do not taste what falls under the tale".] (Diogenes Laertius, D. 463-12)

[The bracketed sections are transparent additions, late marginal comments which crept into the text in repeated copyings. This is a comment phenomenon in the transmissions of MSS texts.]

These three koans refer to the concept of the "whole", which reaches through a great deal of Greek philosophy down the ages, and deals with the division of the whole into discrete parts. On the one hand we know the circle both as Aristotle's perfect motion and form, and Euclid's notion of wholes as sums of parts. But on the other hand we have Democritean atomism as a realistic way of seeing wholes made up of parts. Presumably at a time when "whole" was not an common, understandable concept, reinforcing "wholeness" by examples (the whole round- loaf of bread), as well as by meditation, would be considered worthwhile. By Aristotle's time "the whole" is as common a concept as the cardinal numbers, although our "zero" might stand in the same position to his zero-less world, as the "whole" was before that time..

The concepts of "right" and "left" are ubiquitous in human societies, they have something to do with the way the brain and hands are connected; this "handedness" often involves cultural preferences and probably goes back to an intuitive sense of the different functions of the hemispheres of the brain. But the physicist's concept of "parity" is also a matter of handedness, and the work of Yang and Lee in 1956 with the experimental confirmation of Ms. Wu, proved that parity or universe "mirror-image-ism" need not be conserved. This points to a general handedness of the universe, as it now appears, so that when the koan points the novice to noticing the meaning of handedness, it refers him to something very important in the universe, although it would take two thousand years to make this clear.. The strangely left-handed growth pattern of the hops plant, in a dextro-tortuous botanical world, might provide a suitable modern koan for a biologically oriented college student at the present time.

The following lessons could become rote rituals, but only to one who had

completely failed to understand the spirit of his assigned lesson:

26) One must put on the right shoe first. (Iamblichus, D. 464-23)

67) Put the right foot into the shoe first, but for foot washing, do the left first. (Iamblichus, D. 466-23)

If putting on the shoe is Yang, and right-handed, then washing the dirt off the foot is Yin, which must be equated with the left. We are apparently dealing with an intuitive lesson in proportion, thus:

right : put on :: take off : left

16) Of salt, it is right to set it out (as at dinner) as a reminder of the just, for salt preserves what it contacts, and is produced by the cleansing actions of sun and sea. (Diogenes Laertius, D. 463-27)

When a person defines salt as something in a shaker on restaurant tables, pickling salt, plating salts, the "salt of the earth", or NaCl, he tells us a great deal about his cultural and intellectual proclivities. So with this Pythagorean comment..

The justification of salt (αλ) as a condiment for food is curiously tied to its ability to preserve food, as well as its mysterious origin through the process of evaporation by sun's heat from seawater. Use of salt on the dinner table has nothing to do with either of these processes, but the following remark shows that Pythagoreans were interested in explaining "salt-pickling" and "salt by evaporation of water" as phenomena. The idea of "explanation": by definition of use is incorrect, but as natural as answering the question: "What is chocolate?" by saying "It is something to eat".:

IV: THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

Another group of the Pythagorean Symbola deals with religious and spiritual matters. The majority of these sayings directs the learner toward a higher level of spiritual sensitivity, and several approach the level of the Zen koans in their subtle reaching for unverbalizable concepts. In all these koans, there is a movement away from the common and ordinary toward the elevated and special, from an accepted traditional rote-role in religious thought, toward a higher personal and intellectual plane.

82) Fail not to believe any amazing things about deities, or ideas about the theic. (Iamblichus, D. 466-30)

Centuries of formalization of the corpus of Greek myths, accompanied by rationalizing and suiting them for the state cults, had removed a great deal of what was originally theological and astounding. Pythagoras warns the novice to keep his expectations of the wondrous very high, a cautious taken seriously by the Mysteries in Hellenistic times, and not ignored by early Christianity.

58) One must not go to a temple as side-issue, nor fall right down (automatically) on his knees, not even if he happens to be passing the very doors of the holy place. (Iamblichus, D.466-16.)

39) One must not turn out of his way to a temple; one must not make God a side-issue. (parergon) (Iamblichus, D. 464-35)

57) Going away to a holy temple, kneel down, and meanwhile neither think nor do anything pertaining to one's regular life. (Iamblichus, D. 466-16)

59) Sacrifice and kneel barefoot. (Iamblichus, D. 466-18)

The road to the temple is a special part of The Way (Tao), and cannot be

dealt with thoughtlessly. In the ancient world, worship was done before the temple rather than in it, and now the worshiper must remember to take off his shoes, as his out-of-place road-gear. Had religious devotions not become automatic and meaningless by this time, such a caution would hardly have been required. A major problem with all religious observance is the unnoticed conversion of ritual, via habit, into rote.

73) Keep a cock but do not sacrifice it. (Iamblichus, D. 466-27)

lo)... and do not lay hands on a white rooster, since it is holy to Moon, and a suppliant. [This is one of the good things, he is holy to Moon, and signals the time; if white it is of good nature, if black of bad.] (Diogenes Laertius, D. 463-16)

35) Do not sacrifice a white rooster, which is a suppliant and holy to Moon, and also signals the time. (Iamblichus, D. 464 -31)

Appreciation of the identity of such a common barnyard phenomenon as a rooster is effected by its one significant trait, its crowing at sunrise and moonlight. If even the cock has meaning in world-order, and knows Sun and Moon, listen when the winds blow. And will not each other living thing also have meaning? For example:

34) Do not chase after your wife, for she is a holy suppliant. We (rather) lead her from the hearth, and let the "taking" of her be on the right side. (Iamblichus, D. 464-230.)

Aristotle amplified this (D. 465-15 ff.) with a remark about this being an ancient form of law designed to protect women from their husbands, adding the comment that "in this way least harm will be seen to result". Delicacy and respect for so complex a biological and spiritual entity as a "wife" must be observed.

In a Western world where rape and violent physical abuse of women has at last come to public attention, this precaution seems remarkably pertinent. Sensitivity and respect for "wife" should be a part of the man's catechism.

63) When the winds blow, kneel down to Echo. (Iamblichus, 466-21)

Of course echo is a phenomenon of energy transmission through the elastic molecular medium we call "air", and has little to do with the direction of the wind other than a very minor Doppler effect. But there is something lovely and respectful about this koan. It is respect for the world around us, rather than Physics, which is being elucidated.

33) Do not have the figure of a deity on your ring [lest it get dirty in use]. Rather have a statue of deity, and keep it in your house (Iamblichus, D. 464-29)

52) Do not carry images of deities on rings. (Diogenes Laertius, D. 466-5)

The Gods are not ornaments, their graven images must not be carried around on a finger-ring, to be exposed to the routines of daily life. One thinks of the respectful Hebrew ban on graven images of deities, faithfully continued in the Moslem tradition.

53) Make sacrifices to the gods over the "ears" of the cups. (Diogenes Laertius, D. 466-7)

32) Pour a libation to the gods over the "ear" of the cup, for the sake of a good omen (oionon) so that one cannot drink from it (the "ear" or mouth of the vessel). Iamblichus, D. 464-28

A cup can be poured out in several ways. Holding the cup in the right hand by the handle or "ear" (which the shape of an applied cup handle resembles), wine can be poured out toward the pourer to drink it, as we all do daily. Or it can be poured out to the left to share, to pour some into a cup for another

person. Then it can be poured over the far edge of the cup, away from the holder, which is the usual way of throwing out the contents or emptying the cup. Now these are all the daily uses of cup-pouring, and as such they are not suitable for special religious use. The one way we never employ is pouring the wine out over the handle inverting the wrist, an inconvenient and unusual gesture to be sure. So that is exactly the gesture which the Pythagoreans will mandate for religious services.

In the National Geographic some years ago, a reporter was interviewing in depth a Hassidic Jewish family in Brooklyn. One day, dining with the family, he attempted to pour for someone a glass of soft drink from a bottle, outward, and over his hand. The shocked family explained that this was forbidden, it was a ritual used on in a funeral ceremony. Again, a sense of specialness, reserved for a special use! Whether this is a parallel development to the Pythagorean notion, or independently generated, is unclear.

Libation too must be treated with special reverence, the ritual must be kept as pure as the lustral water itself:

28) One must not dip one's hand into the lustral vessel., or wash in the public bath.[It is not clear in these cases if the participants do become cleansed.] (Iamblichus, D. 464-24)

It would seem that the idea of dirty-ing the lustral water was extended in a footnote to the very different notion of public bathing. Both are concerned with dirt washing off, but in the ritual washing it is the water which must be kept clean, whereas in physical body-bathing it is the body we want to cleanse.

57) Going away to a holy temple, kneel down, and the meanwhile neither think nor do anything pertaining to one's regular life.

One thinks of the basic Zen emptying of the mind, clearing away all unessential thought, finally clearing away all thought..... This is necessary for deep thought, and not unlike the "kenosis" or spiritual emptying of the Eastern Christian church.

V: THE THOUGHTS OF THE POET

A number of the Pythagorean Symbola are distinguished by their poetic quality, much in the manner of classical Zen koans, while some are at the same time moral and ethical.

2) He (Pythagoras) said certain things in a mystical manner... e.g. the sea is "a tear"; the bears "the hands of Rhea; the Pleiades "the lyre of the Muses; the planets "the hound of Persephone; and the sound that arises when the bronze (cymbal) is struck is "the voice of a spirit threatened by the bronze". Porphyrius DK.462-40

5) He explained earthquake as nothing else than assembly of the dead Aelian, D. 463-6

21)What is fairest? Harmony. Iamblichus D. 464 -9

22)What is strongest? Intelligence (gnome).Iamblichus, D. 464 -10

23)What is best? Happiness. Iamblichus, D. 464-10

What more can be said, or need be said.

VI: RELIGIOUS TABUS

A number of the Pythagorean sayings refer to special foods which must be scrupulously avoided. These have generally been taken as tabus with a primarily religious meaning, which is an easy way to dismiss what we do not understand. Since it is often impossible to identify with anything like scientific precision plants and animals which are verbally described in an ancient tradition, there seems little hope that we can grasp the original meaning of many of these Pythagorean food interdictions. On the other hand, raising a powerful herb called malache (spelled moloche in 95) but not eating it implies a pharmacological awareness of some degree:

3) 'He said that the holiest thing of all was the leaf of the plant "malache". (Aelian D.463-4.)

It would seem that the name malache/moloche is related to the general Semitic root *moloch" king". If so perhaps we should look at the Greek translation of this herb into Gr. basileus "king" and the herb "basil". Why Basil should be holy is yet unclear....

61) Avoid (eating) melanouros or " the fish blacktail", for it belongs to the Earth Deities. Iamblichus, D. 466-19

The fish melanouros seems to be a variety of catfish, the Pythagorean interdiction may stem from a parasite it carried which was found dangerous to humans, rather than from its singular form beside familiar teleostic, bony fish. This catfish is the *oblata melanura* which Aristotle described (Hist. An.. 591 a 15) as emitting a growl while protecting the eggs, a detail which Harvard's Louis Agassiz found correct, renaming it *Melanura Aristotelis*.. Perhaps the singular sound which the protecting male emits registered to the Pythagoreans as a warning!

From another point of view, the flesh of the catfish is reddish. If one believes in human/animal re-incarnations, which the ancient tradition attributed to the Pythagoreans, this might suggest affinity with mammal flesh, and ultimately humans.

Had trichinosis not persisted to the present day, we would find it hard to understand why the ancient Hebrews were so adamant about avoiding the ingestion of pork. We might well have invented a purely religious explanation, perhaps a hostile "Pig God" of a neighboring populace, and thus missed the warning about a disabling infectious disease.

Diet is one of the most basic ways of distinguishing culture, and the Pythagorean preferences may be in part an act of self-identification of the brotherhood as different from ordinary people. In Japan the Zen monk has a prescribed diet, which both suits his religious conscience, and also identifies him to the public as a special kind of person. All in all it seems best to leave the Pythagorean food-injunctions untouched, as it were, in an intellectual "bracket" We may be able to say more about these things later on a nutritional, parasitical and pharmacological basis.

VII: QUESTIONABLE OR INSOLUBLE ENTRIES

The next three entries seem incongruous with Pythagorean thought: The first stems from the later misanthropic philosophical tradition, while the second is a borrowing from the Tyrtaean Spartanophile poetry of the 7th c. Both were probably incorporated in Hellenistic schoolbooks and may have been thoughtlessly injected here. The third example is in straight "work-ethic" format, a foreign note in a philosophical monastic brotherhood! These examples are quoted mainly to show how foreign, intrusive material looks in a matrix of real Pythagorean thinking.

23) [What is the truest thing ever said? What men are evil.]. (Iamblichus, D. 464-11)

40) [To die standing firm and receiving wounds on the front of the body is good. the reverse is bad.] (Iamblichus, D. 464-36)

37) [Work is good, but leisure (hedone) is in every way evil. [One must chastise those coming to chastisement.]] (Iamblichus, D. 464-34)

The following two remarks occur together and were probably joined later by a simple similarity of wording. #88) Must be dietary, since there was little awareness of the brain as a central control system, but #87) seems to be of a different character, since it employs the verb *trwgein*, "gnaw, gnaw at, bite on", and hence has hints of personal, emotional meaning.

87) Gnaw not the heart. Iamblichus, D. 466-33

Are we speaking of food or psychology? Or both at the same time?

88) Eat not the brain. Iamblichus, D. 466-34

The huge amount of cholesterol in brains is something known to us recently, we assume the ancients had no idea of this. But if those who ate the brain often as a delicacy were dying young, someone may have made a mental note of the fact.

30) Do not associate with a woman who has gold for the purpose of begetting children. Iamblichus, 464-26

Confusing social-economic and genetic-biological line would seem reprehensible in a world just beginning to sense the way economics operates in a growing society. Or are we speaking of personal operators? Or of something else?

74) Do not sit on a choinix (gallon bucket). Iamblichus, D. 466-28

There is a common Greek saying for describing someone who is lazy: "He sits on a bucket". In this context, a caution about being lazy would seem inappropriate, but this is also something the novice would have to take away and think about. Finally it would come to mind that in the grand world-order there is a not a great deal of difference between "one who does" and "one who does not". In terms of traditional Hindu belief, the killer and killed are one and the same (Bhag. Gita). Buckminster Fuller maintained that everything and everyone are to be counted in the totality of the complete Universe, whether visibly contributing or "just being there". So in Milton's words in the Ode on his Blindness: "They also serve who only sit and wait". Perhaps so here.

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