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CHAPTER 3

Pythagoras

Was he the first and greatest scientific genius of the Western world? Was he a man of preternatural wisdom and psychic power, a master of the laws of consciousness and a spiritual guide to thousands? An incarnation of God? Or was he only an extraordinary combination of mathematician and mystagogue, an occultist, a "magician"?

All this and much more has been said of Pythagoras. Part man, part legend, the historical person is enveloped in uncertainty. Born in Asia Minor, perhaps in the year 569 B.C., he passed his early life on the island of Samos and is said to have flourished in 530 B.C. during the reign of the tyrant Polycrates. He seems to have left Samos to escape from the tyranny and to have settled in Croton in southern Italy, where, it is said, he rose to a position of great authority. His society came under attack in the year 500 B.C. and, after many wanderings in Italy, Pythagoras died at a ripe old age at Metapontium. It is said by some that he passed his middle years in Egypt studying the great knowledge and was taken to Babylon as a hostage when the Persian king, Cambyses, invaded Egypt. In Babylon, so the legend goes, he was also instructed in the teachings of the Zoroastrians.

Like Socrates, Pythagoras wrote nothing, or, if he did, nothing of it has survived the centuries. But unlike the case of Socrates, Pythagoras had no Plato, no contemporary pupil who systematized his teachings into formulations and arguments. The principal historical documents about the man and his teaching date from no

less than eight hundred years after he lived and are mainly collections of stories and legends of questionable literal accuracy. These principal biographies do not offer much to the historian in search of facts about the external details of Pythagoras' life nor to the scholar in search of straightforward information about his ideas. But they are of great value as indications about the nature of awakening ideas and the manner in which they are transmitted.

This question of the transmission of ideas is absolutely central. Its neglect has bred tremendous confusion and prejudice throughout modern history and is one of the main reasons that philosophy has fallen to so low an estate in modern times. More, the neglect of this issue is a principal cause of the fact that reasoning and knowledge themselves have lost their moral power in our lives.

A consideration of the towering figure of Pythagoras will show us that there are two fundamental types of ideas. The first type may be regarded as a sort of energy, a higher energy that can, under very exact conditions, enter into the life of man with transforming effect. The energy of such ideas has been spoken of in ancient language as a spiritual food, the "manna from heaven" of the Old Testament. The verbal formulation of these ideas is only one aspect, though of course an important aspect, of the conditions necessary for the transmission of the energy they contain. The other conditions are many and varied, including certain forms of communal relations and the employment of many different kinds of symbolic methods—art, architecture, music, dance; as well as a certain orientation toward the needs of the body with respect to diet, sex, sleep, physical work, vocation, and numerous other factors. Here the verbal, conceptual formulation of ideas is only one element in a remarkable sort of overall existential training in which a greater energy is assimilated in the developing human being.

Nevertheless, these formulations, although they are only one aspect of the process by which man works for transformation, have a unique role in this process, especially in a culture where the

development of intellect assumes a dominant role—a culture such as our own and such as existed in ancient Greece. This unique role we have already identified when we considered the impact of Socratic questioning. The authentic formulation of great ideas has the effect of bringing a man to silence, of stopping the mind. That is to say, the formulations of great ideas can create in us the state of self-questioning. “Only when thoughts are stopped can real thinking begin.”

This oracular-sounding statement will be developed as we proceed with our discussion of Pythagoras. But let us now consider the second type of ideas. And let us begin by giving them a different name: concepts. Concepts require little more than careful verbal formulation in order to be communicated. They are, as it were, messages from the intellect to the intellect. To be understood, they require the analytic and combinatory powers of the mind, functions which are now being duplicated with increasing success by computers. In fact, one of the most important lessons that the technological revolution is now offering modern man is the realization of the automatic quality of those mental processes which he had hitherto identified as aspects of his freedom. This, too, we shall have to look at more closely in later chapters. The scientific world is a great bringer of questions—in its way a great “teacher” about ourselves and our illusions. But it functions as such only if we find a certain attitude toward the remarkable products of modern science, and only if we possess the necessary *ideas* (not concepts) that can guide this attitude.

Concepts are, so to speak, problem-solving devices, the internal equivalent of technologies; they are the technologies of the mind-machine. Concepts, theories, hypotheses, distinctions, comparisons—all these may be taken ultimately as instruments for organizing perceptions into logically consistent patterns called explanations. But they do not and cannot awaken in man a new quality of feeling or perceiving, a new organ or faculty of awareness. Concepts are no more nor less than tools by which man

combines or analyzes that which he already knows through perceptions. If man's perceptions are limited mainly to the external senses, concepts can do no more than organize the material collected by the senses. Concepts can never reach beyond the level of perception or awareness at which man lives. Ideas, on the other hand, evoke, support, and require a higher level of awareness itself.

The great contribution of modern Anglo-American philosophy has been to expose the nature and limitations of concepts and conceptual thought. The sterility of this philosophy stems only from its unwarranted assumption that ideas are the same thing as concepts. In modern philosophy the basic metaphysical and moral questions of human life are often treated as meaningless locutions, confusions of language, fantasies, even “illnesses.” And there is something tellingly true about this approach because for many centuries preceding our own the great questions of philosophy had degenerated into the confusion of ideas and concepts. No wonder modern man could never solve the problem of free will, or the problem of the existence of God, or the problem of the relationship between mind and body. Long before the rise of contemporary scientific, logical philosophy, ideas began to be treated as concepts, as problem-solving devices. When this happens, when it is forgotten that real ideas require not only intellectual attention, but an all-round moral effort in order to be grasped, then a hopeless confusion sets in compounded of ingenious metaphysical, ethical, or logical theories dealing with questions that actually require the activation within man of an entirely new energy of mind, an entirely new state of consciousness.*

Modern Anglo-American philosophy is quite correct in diagnosing the pathology of “philosophizing.” Starting with the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume and proceeding

*See Plato's allegory of the cave in the *Republic*. The prisoners can see only the shadows cast upon the wall in front of them. They are so shackled that they cannot see the real objects behind them merely by turning their heads. They must turn the whole body, the whole person, in order to see the reality that is directly behind them.

up to the twentieth-century philosophers Wittgenstein, Russell, Ayer, and many others, metaphysical speculation came to be identified as an exercise in futility. Just as Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx compellingly exposed the hypocrisies of modern European Judeo-Christian doctrines and forms, so contemporary scientific philosophy exposed the confusions of modern European metaphysical thought. But just as Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx were acquainted only with religious forms that had long since lost their real energy, so philosophers like Hume, Wittgenstein, and Russell were acquainted only with ideas whose formulations had long since lost their awakening force. Just as religion had been replaced by systems of rigid belief and oppressive moral fantasies, so philosophical ideas had been replaced by abstractions and concepts designed solely to solve problems of the intellect.

For many centuries, therefore, the life of Western civilization has been conducted in an ever-thickening atmosphere of concepts, theories, and hypotheses which were neither outwardly practical nor inwardly awakening. Questions concerning God, immortality, authentic morality, human identity were surrounded by the dead skin of great ideas—formulations that no longer served the purpose of guiding the act of self-interrogation, by which act alone such questions can be faced.

We need to find a proper name for this dubious offspring of ideas and concepts. How shall we designate these queer entities that superficially resemble their "parents," but which actually share none of their parents' real characteristics—yet which have exercised and continue to exercise such a harmful influence in our lives? What to call these mental formations that neither support inner questioning nor solve external problems, that serve neither the evolution of consciousness in man nor his immediate material survival in the world?

There are two reasons why I am concerned about correct terminology here. In the first place, both ideas and concepts are equally necessary to the life and development of man. Each has

its proper sphere of activity corresponding to the two natures of man himself, the two worlds he is destined to inhabit by his very structure. Ideas move man toward the confrontation of his two natures by their power to support the act of total self-interrogation. Concepts, on the other hand, are mental mechanisms enabling man to function outwardly in the struggle with the specific challenges of external nature and social reality. A careless choice of terminology to designate the confusion of ideas and concepts may cause us to confer an excessive value on one or another part of human nature.

In the second place, it is necessary to keep in mind the fact that the abuse of the automatic mechanisms of thought cannot be eliminated by yet other automatic mechanisms—which is the main error of modern philosophy. The intellect's interference in the development of our lives is of such an immense importance and demands such a radical "cure" that the very word used to speak of it must touch not only the intellect but also the heart. The ancient inner traditions made use of mythic and symbolic expressions—"demons," "fallen angels," "dragons," "monsters"—that communicated the evil of approaching ultimate (sacred) questions with the wrong part of ourselves, and the dimensions of the struggle needed to resist this tendency.

As the invention of such a symbol is beyond my powers, I can only propose that we speak of these hybrids as *conceptualized ideas*. Although this term has no mythic or symbolic power, it can at least remind us, whenever we use it, of the existence of real ideas. For the purposes of definition, we may say that conceptualized ideas appear when the formulations of real ideas are treated solely or mainly as concepts, as principles or mechanisms for organizing data received through the senses in our ordinary state of consciousness. They therefore foster the illusion that the fundamental questions of life can be approached and even solved by one small part of the human psyche—the isolated intellect. And they foster the further illusion that ultimate truths about man and the universe

can penetrate into the unconscious emotional and instinctive parts of ourselves without a long, difficult, and carefully guided inner struggle.

This terminology therefore enables us to speak more specifically about our pervasive inability to live according to what we believe to be the truth—about God or reality or our moral obligations. The point is that *conceptualized ideas cannot be assimilated into the whole of ourselves*. On the other hand, the primary function of real ideas is to bring a unifying energy into the whole structure of human nature. As for authentic concepts, which organize the data of external experience, they do not need to be assimilated by the whole person; that is not what they are for.

Finally, we can begin drawing the distinction between real philosophy and “philosophizing,” and we can—without fear of insulting anyone—return the word “philosophy” to its rightful owners after its many centuries of exile. What proceeds under that exalted name in modern times may be spoken of now simply as conceptual analysis. To put it schematically, real philosophy degenerates into “philosophizing,” which in turn is cured or destroyed by conceptual analysis. Similarly, within ourselves, real ideas degenerate into conceptualized ideas—but here the “cure” is rather more complex, involving, as it does, the educational *therapaeia* of persons and not only of systems of thought. Thus Socrates also engages in conceptual analysis, but only with the far greater aim of igniting the act of total self-questioning.

Who is the rightful “owner” of the word *philosophy*? It is none other than Pythagoras, and not only because historically it was he who coined the term.* It is necessary to understand *why* he invented this word.

To understand why Pythagoras introduced the new word *philosophy* into the language of the Greeks, we need only refer to our

*See Peter Gorman, *Pythagoras* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 38.

discussion of love. Philosophy is the love of wisdom, not the possession of it. Philosophy is the striving to attain to the state in which the energy of truth, or real ideas, penetrates into one's flesh and blood, as well as one's mind.

The importance of this definition of philosophy cannot be overstated. Pythagorean ideas are not concepts. They were not transmitted in the manner of concepts; their action upon the mind of man was not the action of concepts. It is no doubt true that soon after the death of Pythagoras, and perhaps during his life as well, the ideas he brought (from where? from Egypt?) were spoiled by others and became what is historically known as Pythagoreanism. But this is only to repeat what we have already stated about the fate of real ideas in insufficiently prepared minds: Real ideas degenerate into conceptualized ideas.

Thus, even today Pythagoras is widely regarded as the inventor of mathematics in its modern sense. From the modern point of view, Pythagoras appears as a wondrous and strange visionary in whom authentic scientific genius was mingled with religious superstition and occultist charlatany. He taught that number lay at the heart of reality, this being interpreted as a great pre-vision of the modern scientific view of the mathematical structure of the universe. However, modern mathematics is nothing more nor less than a superb system of concepts, as was persuasively argued by Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell in the early part of this century.

For Pythagoras, number was an idea, not a concept. It was a guide to self-inquiry and the transformed experience of being, rather than a principle for organizing the data of ordinary experience and articulating the analytic and combinatory functions of the intellect.

Understood in this light, modern mathematics results from the same historical dialectic as modern philosophy. Real ideas degenerate into conceptualized ideas. These conceptualized ideas are then, by the process of conceptual analysis, purged of that in them which is unverifiable by the ordinary mind. The teachings of

Pythagoras became the "philosophizing" of Pythagoreanism and, as such, fascinated the Western world throughout the centuries of late antiquity, bursting forth with renewed attraction in the Renaissance and eventually exerting a dominant influence on the fathers of modern science: Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and, above all, Isaac Newton. The early modern era abounds with Pythagorean philosophizing—perhaps even more so than in late antiquity. Formulations such as "the harmony of the spheres," "cosmic order," "the central sun," "force and counterforce," and many other Pythagorean/Hermetic expressions are altered into metaphysical concepts—conceptualized ideas—and galvanize some of the most influential minds of the era. They then are subjected to conceptual analysis by a Descartes, a Newton, a Leibniz and soon become the effective concepts of modern science—mathematics, physics, chemistry. Stripped of their apparently superstitious aspects, these Pythagorean ideas become the modern concepts of number, energy, and causal order, the great problem-solving mechanisms that have organized the whole of modern life through the development of scientific technology.

Thus, modern mathematics is nothing more or less than the criticism of Pythagoreanism. Mathematics, as we know it, has little to do with the primordial idea of number, as little as concepts have anything essential in common with ideas.

Here it is necessary to note something important about these apparently superstitious aspects of Pythagoreanism. Before coming under the scrutiny of conceptual analysis, Pythagorean formulation contained many elements which we nowadays would call mythical, symbolic, ritualistic, mystical, magical, and occult. Throughout the centuries Pythagoreanism has been associated with such things as magic squares, musical notations, mythological allusions, alchemical symbols, anatomical and physiological diagrams, and much else of this nature.

These elements may perhaps best be understood as disconnected remnants of what was once the full method of transmission of ideas by the school of Pythagoras. Of course, we do not know

all the conditions which Pythagoras established for the transmission of his teaching. Historical documents tell us of his methodical use of parable and symbol, of meditation, of the discipline of silence, of the study of music and sacred dance, of the master-pupil relationship, and of specific degrees of initiation; we hear of indications concerning diet, sleep, sexual activity, and communal order; indications concerning family life, vocation, physical work; we hear of rituals involving certain distinct periods of the year and times of the day; there are rules of some distinct sort having to do with relationships among the brotherhood (which included women) and between members of the brotherhood and those outside it.

The "superstitious" elements are the only generally known surviving remnants of these methods and, of course, from such meager remnants it is impossible to reconstruct an adequate picture of the teaching of Pythagoras. I bring up this point about the superstitious elements of Pythagoreanism in order to clarify an interesting and significant historical fact about the immense influence of Pythagoreanism in the early modern era. At the same time that conceptual analysis was purging Pythagoreanism of its superstitious elements and laying the groundwork for the powerful conceptual system of modern science, the imagery connected with Pythagoreanism was widely adopted by visionary poets and artists throughout the European world. From Shakespeare to William Blake, from Goethe to Hölderlin, and perhaps including Dürer, Mozart, and the Florentine architect Brunelleschi, Pythagoreanism was the most important new source of artistic metaphor from the Renaissance onward.

Conceptual analysis rescued the problem-solving, explanatory aspects of Pythagoreanism; artistic feeling, on the other hand, appropriated the imaginative residue neglected by the scientific philosophers. Thus was created, in its modern form, the rupture between art and science corresponding in ourselves to the rupture between intellect and emotion, with all its disastrous consequences in our individual and collective lives.

It is a characteristic of philosophizing that it leaves an emotional residue when it is purged by conceptual criticism. The needs and longings that draw us to invent or believe in conceptualized ideas about God, immortality, or reality continue to exist in ourselves or in our culture even after the most thorough conceptual correction. The result is a condition of fragmentation or contradiction within the individual and within the culture. Within the individual, within ourselves, this condition of fragmentation can take many forms. In one part of my life, in one part of the psyche, I am analytic, critical, and scientific, carefully weighing and testing the coherence and utility of all general concepts; while in another part of my life and mind I am "religious," "spiritual," interested in art, morality, service to great causes. The need for contact with the higher lives on in these latter pursuits, but only at the emotional level. The contradiction between the intellectual and the emotional aspects of the self remains unresolved. Moreover, the condition of self-contradiction itself is veiled, buffered by opinions about oneself as being "a complex individual," "interestingly varied" in one's interests and concerns. This process of covering over the contradiction between the conceptual and valuational parts of the mind can go very far indeed—we shall consider it more fully in its proper place. For now, we can certainly find examples, if not in ourselves (it is almost impossible to see it in oneself), then in others—such as scientists who are simultaneously men of religious belief or moral fervor accepting doctrines or acting on assumptions about man and the universe that have little or no conceptual clarity or rational justification.

In the culture at large, this condition of fragmentation and internal contradiction also manifests itself in numerous ways, some obvious, some subtle. But in any case, terms like "pluralism," "tolerance," and "individualism" often mask what is simply lack of relationship between the parts of ourselves, while various superficial attempts to integrate the parts mask the absorption of one part by another—such as the secularization of religion under the banner of "relevance" and "social concern."

The formation of conceptualized ideas occurs when the ordinary intellect takes over the formulations of real ideas and converts them into concepts. When this happens, the part of the mind that longs for inner truth has already been left behind. Visionary critics of the contemporary era who seek to heal the present state of cultural and psychological fragmentation by harking back to pre-modern philosophizing or poetics have not seen this point. "Unity" of ordinary thought and ordinary emotion is precisely the enemy of truth. What is needed is the unity of pure thought and pure feeling. This authentic structural unity of human nature is, however, possible only with the development in man of an attention that can make contact with all the parts of the self. This attention first appears only when I myself am in question in the midst of life. The first function of real ideas is not to unite the parts of us into a superficial harmony, but to separate them—that is, to break down the deceptive unity called ego.

When we say that it is Pythagoras who stands behind Socrates, we are saying that there are ideas that bring us to authentic silence of the mind and support the initiatives of self-interrogation.

Clearly, the very word *philosophy*, which Pythagoras introduced, is such an idea. It identifies a part of the self that seeks something other than the satisfaction of material or psycho-social desires. In so doing, it encourages us to attend more carefully to those seemingly random and disconnected moments in life when a new feeling breaks through—the feeling of wonder or profound and impersonal doubt brought about through contact with immense forces of nature or the overwhelming disappointments and sufferings of human existence. Without such a guiding idea, these moments go by without being recognized for what they are: signs of another force of being within us calling to us.

It is this latent force within man which Pythagoras designated by the word *psyche*, soul. "Give attention to the soul" is a phrase that practically defines the whole of the teaching of Pythagoras and Socrates. Here the idea is that there is something within myself that corresponds to the highest principle of the universe, but which

will not enter into my life automatically. A specific act of attention is required, that same attention which can appear, but only accidentally and in disconnected flashes, when the ordinary course of life is invaded by great disruption or when, without warning, a moment of silent feeling of new quality accompanies a single perception of something or someone. The idea of the soul was not expressed either by Pythagoras or by Socrates without the concomitant demand to cultivate that quality of attention, nor was it expressed without the help needed by a man to do that work. As has been said, the superstitions that surrounded imaginary Pythagoreanism were faint residues of that help.

The term *soul* became a conceptualized idea the moment this act of attention was misunderstood. "Give attention to the soul" becomes "tending the soul" only in the sense of forming concepts and images about oneself and entertaining fantastic opinions of man's automatic inner divinity, leading to exaggerated ethical programs and bitterly unrealizable moral demands. This is an aspect of philosophizing that deserves a separate name because of the unusually destructive influence it has had in the course of centuries. To speak of it as "psychologizing" or "moralizing" is equally appropriate, but perhaps the former term is better because these fantastic moral programs, when subjected to the purging scrutiny of conceptual analysis, become what we know as modern psychiatry.

It is not possible to run through, even briefly, all the ideas of Pythagoras. I will confine myself to mentioning several others that will be of special importance in the following chapters where we shall try to penetrate behind the problems of our contemporary life and culture.

Many of the ideas of Pythagoras long ago entered into our language in the form of words that we use every day without realizing their rich philosophical lineage. When we speak of the

"world" or "cosmos" as an all-encompassing ordered whole, we are using a formulation introduced by Pythagoras. The critical point here is that the vast totality of the cosmos is knowable, intelligible. The cosmos "imitates number": that is, the whole order of the world obeys laws which can be known by the mind.

Stated in the above way, the idea of cosmos merely sounds like one of the clichés of the Western scientific attitude. But truth is not a cliché. If the idea sounds overfamiliar and obvious, it is only because we no longer feel what it means. We no longer feel what it means partly because the modern scientific concept of the cosmos has excised something essential from this formulation of Pythagoras.

The idea of cosmos is in no way comparable to the concept of universe. The cosmos is knowable in the sense that what is real and fundamental is purpose, intention, and harmony. Being is Mind. But it is not my mind; or, rather, it is the mind of man insofar as he develops all his mental, moral, and physical possibilities. The cosmos is knowable, but we cannot know it until we become similar to it. The modern concept of the universe retains only the first part of this statement—reality as knowable—but does away with the second part, the need for a development of the whole of man's psyche.

The idea of the cosmos and the concept of the universe both refer to all that we see and infer around us: biological life, the planet earth, the solar system, the sun, other suns and solar systems, all the galaxies—all the entities in the reaches of space which, as contemporary technology is now beginning to show, exhibit a completely unforeseen variety in size, structure, polarity, and tempo. All of this, together with the mathematical laws of physics, adds up to the universe in modern terms. But it is not cosmos, although it is contained by cosmos. In the Pythagorean idea there exist entities and substances permeating the universe we see, which have material, causal efficacy and power, but which are at the same time pure mind or approach very near to being

pure mind. These "winds of heaven" or "etheric substances" are real and material, yet they are also nearly the same thing as number or law. They are more rational, more intelligible, more knowable than the things perceived through the senses, or through instruments, or through inferences made on the basis of conceptual mathematics and refined sensory perception. They are more knowable—that is, they are purer manifestations of mind.

For now, we shall have to leave the formulation at that—acknowledging the apparent paradox this idea contains for us: the paradox of a materiality existing at various levels of mind. We may, however, briefly note what became of this idea when it was conceptualized. In the conceptualized idea of the cosmos, mind and consciousness are separated off from matter. Two realms are posited: the realm of incorporeal being—nonmaterial reality—and the realm of material entities. The immaterial realm becomes conceptualized as a separately existing entity or entities. In religious philosophizing this becomes the concept of God and the angels. In metaphysical philosophizing, this notion of the immaterial realm becomes the conceptualized ideas of "the first cause," or "the noumenon," the "reality behind the appearances"—all understood as separately existing entities of some sort or other. Once the conceptualization is accepted, the door is open to a bewildering variety of pseudoexplanations of the perceived world with no possibility of verification, which is to say that the highest principles of reality are implicitly consigned to the realm of the unknowable. Something called "mysticism" is then invited in through the backdoor in order to bring these imaginary realities again into the realm of the knowable, the intelligible. Or else the mind of man is permanently judged to be incapable of knowing God or the First Cause, and finally permanently judged to be incapable of knowing anything beyond what is revealed to him in his ordinary state of consciousness. That which is inaccessible to the ordinary mind must be accepted on "faith." From here it is but a short step to the tyranny of "dogma" in its modern sense.

Out of this morass of conceptualized ideas about the cosmos there arose a "problem of philosophy" that even today occupies academicians and others. This is the so-called problem of *a priori* knowledge: Is certainty about the world attainable through thought alone or is all significant knowledge rooted in sensory experience? This problem has had a colossal influence in modern times, but it actually represents an advanced stage in the decay of the real idea of the cosmos. Certainly, according to Pythagoras, the cosmos, the deep order of nature, is knowable through self-knowledge—man is a microcosm. But this sort of self-knowledge involves a total inner inquiry into all aspects of the human structure as well as the arising within man of a conscious attention that can penetrate into the unconscious and harmonize all the disparate impulses within the human organism. So-called *a priori* knowledge, on the other hand—knowledge independent of sensory experience—bears only an imitative resemblance to this idea of self-knowledge. It is intellectual knowledge alone that is at issue in the problem of the *a priori*, rather than contemplative knowledge in its ancient sense. Intellectual knowledge alone—concepts alone—can do no more than organize the data provided by the instruments of perception. The ancient idea of knowing the cosmos through knowing oneself is based on the possibility of man's developing new powers of perception within himself. The issue in its modern form ignores or misunderstands that possibility.

Are the few ideas we have mentioned—number, the soul, the cosmos—enough to allow us, finally, to look with the eye of philosophy at the world we live in? Have we found our Socrates? Surely not. But we have to some extent *called* for him and what he represents: the effort of inquiry that seeks to penetrate behind the appearances of the world and of myself—the world as it presents itself in the form of menacing problems to be solved and our own apparent selves with all the seeming good and bad within us.

We have called for ideas, authentic ideas, to come to our aid. Will we be open to them? Or will we, too, spoil them in our haste to formulate answers? Behind the appearances lies the Question. Are we prepared to let the Question break through into our awareness, there to begin its long journey toward the heart?

In that spirit, I offer the following passage as a kind of invocation, written in the fourth century A.D. by the most famous biographer of Pythagoras, the Greek Iamblichus. The opening lines of this biography are as follows:

Since it is usual with all men of sound understandings, to call on divinity, when entering on any philosophical discussion, it is certainly much more appropriate to do this in the consideration of that philosophy which justly receives its denomination from the divine Pythagoras. For as it derives its origin from the Gods, it cannot be apprehended without their inspiring aid. To which we may also add, that the beauty and magnitude of it so greatly surpasses human power, that it is impossible to survey it by a sudden view; but then alone can one gradually collect some portion of this philosophy, when, the Gods being his leaders, he quietly approaches to it. On all these accounts, therefore, having invoked the Gods as our leaders, and converting both ourselves and our discussion to them, we shall acquiesce in whatever they may command us to do. *

To this we may simply add that in the teaching of Pythagoras, the gods are the ideas and ideas are gods.

*Iamblichus' *Life of Pythagoras*, trans. Thomas Taylor (London: John Watkins, 1965), p. 1.

IN THE HEART
OF PHILOSOPHY