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But it is not my intention to continue further a disputation over minor issues of disagreement with Professor Thomson. If I inadvertently misrepresented his position at any point, I unreservedly apologize. On the other hand, I am convinced that I have not praised his book too highly at any point. Readers of the book can judge for themselves of the differences between us.

The discussion between Professor Thomson and myself results in part from difficulties which confront all progressive students of classical antiquity today. There are ambiguities and deceptive parallels and divided sympathies evident in current interpretations because ancient history in some ways resembles our times but is also profoundly different. Professor Thomson's formulations have, so far as I am concerned, sharpened the whole problem of treating the parallels and differences. To this major problem it is my intention to return later in another communication.

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II

The recent discussion between Professors Winspear and Thomson on the social origins of Greek tragedy¹ has raised some interesting questions about the Pythagorean Society, of which Aeschylus is said to have been a member. This is a rather technical matter, but it is important because Pythagoreanism offers one of the best examples possible for the interdependence in antiquity of practice and theory.

Let us examine first the "ten pages of concrete argument" on the early Pythagoreans which Professor Thomson cites from his book.² In the first place, he wishes us to suppose that Pythagoras was democratically disposed because he came from Samos in the time of Polycrates, who was a tyrant heading a popular movement. However, the tradition is unanimous in saying that Pythagoras left Samos in order to *escape* the rule of Polycrates.

Thomson then tries to establish a connection between Pythagoras

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² *Aeschylus and Athens* (London, 1941), p. 210-219; SCIENCE & SOCIETY, loc. cit., p. 279.

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and the commercial development of the Greek world by using two statements of Aristoxenus. As to the first, that he introduced weights and measures to the Greeks, Thomson admits that it has no value, "in the form in which it has come down to us." He cites the assertion of Aristoxenus that Pythagoras developed mathematics "beyond the necessities of trade." This expression itself ought to excite suspicion but we find that the Greek actually says that Pythagoras developed mathematics by "*withdrawing* it ('leading it away', *apagagon*) from the use of the merchants and likening all things to numbers"; in other words, the "advance" consisted in diverting mathematics from its previous useful function to a new, mystical course. Any examination of Pythagorean mathematics will show that it had little to do with commercial uses.

There are many small and largely verbal indications in the tradition which indicate that the Pythagoreans were aristocrats. For example, they are always represented as defending the "ancestral constitution," which was surely aristocratic. But their position can best be understood on the background of the whole political situation. In southern Italy, as in other parts of the Greek world, with the development of handicraft and commerce there grew up alongside the old aristocracy a class of merchants and also a proletariat of artisans, sailors, etc., augmented by dispossessed and harassed peasants. These two classes both began to look for economic and political rights, producing a coalition of wealthy men, themselves often members of the aristocracy like the Alcmaeonidae of Athens, and the poorer classes. In many Greek cities the political power of the landed aristocracy was first broken by movements of this sort led by so-called "tyrants." In the historical situation they represented a progressive force; Thomson recognizes this in dealing with Polycrates. It was only later, after the fuller development of Greek democracy, that these dictatorial leaders, often excessively eager for personal power, became identified with the opposition and the word *tyrannos* acquired its evil connotations. Now Professor Thomson points out that at one period of crisis (about 509 B. C.) the two principal opponents of the Pythagoreans were Ninon, a democrat, and "Kylon the aristocrat, who is described as the leading citizen in wealth and birth"; we find upon examination that this Kylon or Cylon was wealthy and high-born "but in other respects a dangerous person, violent, seditious, and tyrannical in character." This is of course from a source friendly to the Pythagoreans, and this description, along with the alliance with the lower-class Ninon, ought to show Cylon as a popular leader. Thus we find Pythagoras opposed to the tyrant Polycrates and the "tyrannical" Cylon, and in other passages to the tyrant Telys of Sybaris and probably to a tyrant of Croton named Clinias.

Against the forces attempting to dethrone them the oligarchs must present a united front, and this is the function of the Pythagoreans. In Sybaris, Croton, and other places we find them leading the old regime in putting down popular movements. Professor Thomson expresses disbelief, in his book, that an immigrant religious teacher like Pythagoras could assume leadership of the established aristocracy; I believe it occurred precisely because they were hard-pressed in this defensive situation.³

When the Pythagoreans opposed proposals to extend the franchise and make officials responsible to the people, this is taken to show only that they were "moderate democrats, representing the interests of the big merchants, and therefore opposed by the nobility on the one hand and the proletariat on the other."⁴ This would be a strange situation indeed—the extreme democrats and extreme reactionaries banding together against the "middle class" to demand an extension of the franchise. But there is also evidence, from the same source, that the opponents of the Pythagoreans demanded redistribution of land and abolition of debts, certainly not the type of demand to be made by a hereditary land-holding oligarchy.

Pythagoras was a strong figure in every way, but his most original and decisive contribution was in the field of morality and philosophy. We may say that the political situation called forth his philosophy, and it was his philosophy that enabled him to take a strong hand in the political field. Of course the most important Pythagorean doctrine is that of harmony, mentioned by both Winspear and Thomson. That the Pythagoreans applied their mathematical and musical discoveries to social problems is certain; the exact nature of this application is our question. Thomson says, "For the early Pythagoreans, including Aeschylus, the idea of harmony was a positive attitude to the conflict resolved in their democratic *concordia*";⁵ and from his book it appears that he believes the Pythagoreans thought of their class ("big merchants") as forming a mean, socially and now ideologically, between the oligarchs and extreme democrats. "The doctrine of the fusion of opposites in the mean was generated by the rise of the middle class intermediate between the land-owners and serfs."⁶

Of course it is possible to speak of the clash of opposites in such a way that from the interchange something new and higher results. This

³ Thomson's analogy between the Pythagoreans and the Geneva Calvinists, *Aeschylus and Athens*, p. 213-215, cannot have any value as proof. Neither can the fact (p. 212) that they took over some elements of popular religion.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁵ *SCIENCE & SOCIETY*, *loc. cit.*, p. 279.

⁶ *Aeschylus and Athens*, p. 217.

might be called a philosophy of unity, but scarcely of harmony. Pythagorean harmony consists precisely in the fact that each of the opposites remains itself and "keeps its place." In cosmology, the Limit comprehends or confines the Unlimited, and so on; even in music we can scarcely speak of a blend of tones, because ancient music was not polyphonic. In the universe at large, in the state, and in every individual's character, there are present opposite forces and tendencies; but a vital key to the understanding of the situation is in the fact that one set of opposites is good, the other evil. The latter must be completely defeated and controlled. Therefore it seems unjustifiable to speak of a "fusion" of opposites in the mean. *Harmonia* means a fitting together, and most of the other words used signify merely the agreement of the various parts or aspects of a thing rather than a fusion giving a new and different entity. According to Philolaus harmony is the unification of diverse elements, and the agreement of dissentients; this agreement means recognition of the natural hierarchy.

In politics, Pythagorean harmony is an agreement as to who is to rule. "To rule belongs to the better, to be ruled belongs to the worse." There is no suggestion of the "middle class" which Thomson thinks the Pythagoreans represented—certainly no suggestion that all classes should be subsumed or "fused" into this one class, or even that it should hold some sort of balance of power between the others.

Thus Pythagoreanism advocates a static sort of harmony. Anaximander and Heraclitus seem to acquiesce in a way in the clash of opposites; for the Pythagoreans, the very fact of struggle and change is evil, though not actually denied by them as by Parmenides. The perfect universe would be one in which all the Unlimited was controlled by the Limit, all evil by good, crooked by straight, and so on; and, of course, all "subjects" by "rulers." Contrary to what Thomson says, this does seem to "preclude the possibility of further development."⁷ The philosophy of Heraclitus, with its continually recurring cycles, may be said in a sense to represent a "closed system," like other ancient philosophies, but the principal emphasis of his thought is not on this aspect. He insists on the fundamental importance of change and strife in the process of nature and life, so that in the situation his system cannot be considered philosophically reactionary.

It remains to mention the supposed change in Pythagorean political views in the course of the fifth century. Professor Thomson cites Kurt von Fritz's *Pythagorean Politics in Southern Italy* for the view that there was a change "from progressive to conservative," and speaks of this as "the usual fate of moderate progressives." What von Fritz actually

⁷ SCIENCE & SOCIETY, *loc. cit.*, p. 279.

says, however, is that conservatism was "inherent in Pythagorean doctrine," but that despite this conservatism they must have met with opposition at the very beginning of their history (i.e., in the sixth century B. C.) *because of* "what was new in their doctrines." However, they soon became identified with the established aristocratic regime. Then he supposes that in the late fifth and early fourth centuries, *because of their conservatism*, they became supporters of the "rather conservative democracies" against the encroachments of the tyrant Dionysius I of Syracuse.⁸ Whatever the truth of this analysis, it is a different story from the one Thomson wishes to tell.

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The article by Lewis Feuer on "Ethical Theories and Historical Materialism" (vol. VI, p. 242 ff.) has elicited a number of comments which will be published in the summer issue of SCIENCE & SOCIETY.

⁸ *Op. cit.* (New York, 1940), p. 97-99.