

How to create a perfect society: from the Presocratics to Aristotle

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What would the world be like if there were no economic incentives to encourage that kind of behaviour, or if the people who had the power were not motivated by the idea of economic gain? Has anyone ever tried to organise society so that it would not be so?

In this paper I examine the economic considerations and analysis of the role of incentives that underpin radical political solutions, in the utopian thinking of Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle."

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How to create a perfect society: from the Presocratics to Aristotle.

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1 Aristotle.

It is sometimes said that Aristotle was the earliest economic thinker, because of his detailed analysis of the rules for fair exchange where something is valued more highly by one party than the other.

But according to another tradition, even Aristotle was not doing economic thought, because he had no real notion of the market economy. For those who think that "economic thinking" is, by definition, thinking about the market economy, Aristotle was not engaged in what we know as "economics".

This is not really a plausible view. As Scott Meikle has argued, the Greeks had money, commerce, exchange value, and they did engage in systematic thought about these things.¹ Meikle suggests that Aristotle was doing what we would call economic theory. It is just hair splitting to say that it does not count as economic analysis if it does not analyse the behaviour of the capitalist market economy.

Yet I wonder whether it is even true that the Greeks lacked the ideas required to analyse the market economy. Several of their common practices, such as

¹ Scott Meikle, *Aristotle's Economic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 149-50.

slave markets and bottomry loans, seem to presuppose the systems involved in modern markets and investment. And for an early example, take Thales, the very first philosopher in the Western world, perhaps before they even had coinage. One of the most famous stories is of how he took out a lease on all the olive presses in Miletus and Chios, because—realising that olive trees produce a bumper crop in some years—he invests in the olive presses while the price is low, thereby obtaining a monopoly on the means of production, and can then charge an exorbitant price to each of the farmers for using them. Since the harvest is great, the farmers can afford to pay the higher price, and the community doesn't die of starvation; but effectively the producers lose their profit margin, which ends up in the philosopher's pocket—probably in the form of a good few bottles of extra virgin olive oil.

Doubtless Thales puts an advance deposit at the low price charged in a poor cropping year, and then charges the higher price achievable in a good year. This is capitalism: you buy when the shares are cheap and then reap the dividends when the price goes up, due to scarcity, high demand or abundant productivity that only you could predict. One can do all this without the invention of money, since it is simply a matter of the changing exchange value of commodities depending on need and demand. A monetised economy is not needed for market forces of this kind to be apparent.

The Thales story is preserved as an anecdote in Aristotle's *Politics*.

Text I

It's also important to collect the scattered sayings about the ways in which some people have hit upon some way of becoming wealthy. For all these are useful for those who hold the accumulation of wealth as a thing deserving honour. For instance the story of Thales of Miletus. They attribute it to Thales because of his wisdom, but it's a financial idea of quite general application. For when people were despising Thales for his poverty, on the basis that philosophy was useless, they say that he observed (by means of his astronomical expertise) that there would be a glut of olives. So while it was still winter, and he being in possession of a little money, he put down deposits (ἀρραβῶνας διαδοῦναι) on all the olive presses in the region, both in Miletus and Chios, paying only a small price for them at the time since there was no rival bidder. But then when the olive season arrived, and there was a huge demand suddenly and all at the same time, and he could get any kind of repayment he liked, Thales accumulated loads of profits. And that's how he demonstrated that it's easy for philosophers to get rich, if they want to. It's just that they're not that bothered about that kind of thing.

Perhaps this tells us more about what used to happen in Aristotle's day than in that of Thales. We can't be sure who would have owned the olive presses or what Aristotle means by "putting down a deposit").² On the other hand, Aristotle is evidently transmitting an existing anecdote from sometime earlier, and as Presocratic sources go, Aristotle is on the early side.³ This is not Plutarch, or Diogenes Laertius, writing with experience of the Roman economy. The story must have made sense to Aristotle, and it clearly employs the thinking associated with capitalist investment. It is hard to see how such a story could even have been invented at or before the time of Aristotle, if the idea of speculating in the expectation of increased profit margins due to surplus were not familiar. The whole point of the story is that astronomical wisdom can turn out surprisingly useful.

Plainly, then, the Greeks were not innocent of market forces. Yet Aristotle himself, in analysing the economics of exchange, concentrates on what makes exchanges fair.⁴ He stresses the importance of "friendship" in regulating the exchange systems of a political community.⁵ This can't be because he is unaware that competition forces prices down, or that investors try to outwit each other by buying cheap and selling dear. Doubtless he knows all that. But he also knows (anticipated

² ὀρεαβώνας διαδοῦναι, Aristotle *Politics* 1259a13.

³ Alan Greaves, *Miletos: a history* (London: Routledge, 2002) pp 26-28 despises the evidence as too late to be useful, but there is no obvious conflict with the archaeological evidence of olive oil trade in the period. Cf. Alan Greaves, *The Land of Ionia: Society and Economy in the Archaic Period* (Chichester and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) chapter 4.

⁴ See Meikle, *Aristotle's Economic Thought* and Scott Meikle, 'Aristotle and Exchange Value' in David Keyt and Fred D. Miller Jr (eds.), *A Companion to Aristotle's Politics* (Cambridge Mass.: Blackwell, 1991), 156-81

⁵ Suzanne Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995) pp 147-69; Richard Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, ed. Mark Philp (Founders of Modern Political and Social Thought; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) pp 465-70.

by Plato and Pythagoras I suspect) that friendship and fairness are crucial to a good community. He is aware that a community in which people are not out to compete, but rather to collaborate for the good of everyone, is a healthier and happier one. There is something that he calls the "spirit of koinonia"; he associates it with the Graces.⁶ It is partly about reciprocity, mutual give and take, and partly about having a common purpose. It is incompatible with an ideology that tries to reward competitive rivalry and unequal advantage.

When Aristotle suggests that your friend is another self,⁷ he means that if the other person suffers, you are disadvantaged too. Friendship is a mechanism for preventing the "no skin in the game" position enjoyed by today's bankers and investors. In a situation of corporate friendship, the agent suffers with the patient, because the patient is, like a member of his own family, someone whose well-being is as important as his own or more so.

But Aristotle also thinks that inequalities of wealth can be damaging. In Text 2, he observes that the people in charge mustn't be people who are always hankering after the things that others have got, nor being envied by people who hanker after their goods, nor do they want to be the target of plots nor engaged in plots against others.⁸ Unlike Plato, to whose parallel passage we shall come in Text 5, Aristotle concludes that the people in charge will be immune to these dangers not because they are free of the burdens of wealth altogether, as Plato suggested, but because they are all equally and moderately wealthy. They are the middle class. Aristotle thinks that being in the middle range of wealth makes you immune from the vices of avarice, competition and sedition, including the vice of being the target of sedition—vices that he attributes to the poor above all. Plato, by contrast, attributes such vices to the wealthy, precisely because they have private property. Aristotle concluded that the rulers should be the middle class, owners of just the right amount of property, neither too much nor too little. So very Aristotelian.

⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics* V. 5, 1133a3-5. See Meikle, 'Aristotle and Exchange Value' p.179-80.

⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics* IX 1170b6-9.

⁸ *Politics* IV, 1295b29-33.

2 *Plato*

Plato has much to say on how to run a society in which the human spirit can flourish. I will mention only the *Republic* today. It seems to me that the *Republic* is (among other things) an exercise in what we know as economic theory, and that it is particularly interested in what we think of as perverse incentives, and how to eliminate them. In this section I shall look briefly at some of Plato's alternative provision for better incentives to produce the desired results, and then in Part 3 I shall go on to suggest that Plato's thought experiment was inspired by an earlier experiment, a real life utopian project successfully developed by Pythagoras in Southern Italy in the sixth century.

In the *Republic*, Socrates reflects directly on how monetary rewards and private possession affect people's motivation and values. He tries to imagine what would happen if he could completely eliminate the connection between material wealth and power. He pictures how one might create a society in which the state and its institutions promote the things that actually have intrinsic value, instead of subordinating them to misguided values. The things that have real value (according to the Socrates in the dialogue) are truth, knowledge and wisdom. If, as Socrates supposes (at least for the sake of argument), these things are more important than money, possessions, entertainment or even personal affections, then we don't want a state or an economy that treats money or possessions as most important, and leaves things like knowledge, wisdom, education and so on as optional extras, which the wealthy citizens can choose to spend their money on if they fancy doing so. We need instead a state that makes education for wisdom and truth the first and inalienable thing, without which life is not worth living. If you don't need money to get these things, then arguably you don't need money at all. Socrates imagines a state in which you can have other things, such as money or friends, only if they don't destroy the things that are truly good.

I am not sure that Socrates is right to value truth and wisdom so highly above other goods like love, friendship, and artistic creativity; indeed we might doubt whether Plato himself means us to think that the state that Socrates describes is truly the ideal state, with its values all correct and in good order. Perhaps Plato just has Socrates work it all out hypothetically, to see what it would be like were knowledge the only value worth pursuing. But even if it is only a thought experiment,

its contribution to economic and political analysis is important, and can be transferred to different ideas about the supreme values in life. Think about what we truly believe are the highest and most wonderful things that human beings can achieve. Are they things that can be achieved in a state with the kind of economic goals and incentives that we currently have, or do we need a radically different approach? Various things come to mind: for instance, love, art, music, truth, loyalty, honesty, knowledge, freedom, spiritual gifts or intellectual discovery. If these are our goals, our political institutions need to be structured to ensure that once our needs for simple subsistence have been satisfied, the rest goes into supporting those things. The last thing we want is institutions that render those goals harder to achieve or impossible. So as well as asking what institutions could help us to achieve these good things, we must also consider whether some things would make them impossible to achieve.

Socrates starts from simple economic analysis of the processes of exchange among equals. He sketches a system of division of labour, whereby a subsistence community develops specialist crafts to improve its standard of living. But once that has been done, his next task is to increase the sophistication of his society, to give the citizens opportunities to exercise their higher capacities, and to pursue activities that are good for their own sake, not merely for utilitarian purposes.

It is at this point that Socrates' economic thinking radically diverges from economics as we know it. This is not because Plato is unable to do economic analysis, or diagnose how a market economy would work. It is because Plato *is* doing economic analysis, and because he *does* understand how a market economy works, and what the effects of it are. In the background is surely the commodification of expertise and education at the hands of the Sophists in fifth century Greece, on which Plato had surely already reflected several times in some of his other dialogues.

In the *Republic*, Socrates identifies a potential conflict between the motivations that drive economic activity and the motivations needed for a society such as he has in mind, in which intellectual enquiry can be freely exercised without risk of corruption, and in which virtue is not under pressure from materialist values.

To solve this problem, Socrates has his rulers and all the public servants maintained at state expense.

Text 4

"First, private property: none of them should own anything of their own, except what is unavoidable. Second, no house or storeroom or anything like that should be provided for any of them that isn't a place that anyone can go into at will. Third, the rations, such as would be needed by sober and dedicated men trained for war; these—sufficient for a year, with no surplus or shortfall— should be provided out of a tax levy on the rest of the citizens, in return for the protection that the Guardians provide; they'll live a communal life like soldiers, eating together in the refectory.⁹

This allows the Guardians to be free of all contact with money or private property. Although Socrates has not yet drawn the distinction between two kinds of Guardians, on the one hand the auxiliaries, entrusted with the preservation of law and order, and on the other hand the philosopher kings, entrusted with determining the goals and policies of the state, he is already seeking to eliminate corruption in any of the positions of responsibility. Here, at the end of Book 3, he decides that the entirety of his elite, the Guardian classes taken together, is to be deprived of all material reward, and all contact with monetary gain or corruption. He continues as follows:

Text 5

And we'll advise them that they have from the gods all the divine gold and silver that they need permanently in their own souls, and they have no additional need of the human kind—indeed it is offensive for them to defile the possession of that gold with an admixture of possession of the mortal kind, because many unholy things result from the currency of the hoi polloi, but the gold they have is not debased.¹⁰

The contrast in Text 5 between the gold in the soul and the currency of the hoi polloi is no fanciful metaphor. Socrates asks us to consider which kind of currency is valuable, in political decision-making: what do we want our leaders to value—their trustworthy and wise souls, or monetary gain? If anyone thinks that getting *rich* means getting *money* they have made a big mistake, because the true riches are something that cannot be bought for money: indeed worse than that, money destroys them. Trust is one such thing, to which we shall return.

⁹ 416 d-e.

¹⁰ 416e.

The danger, Socrates observes in Text 3, is that the ones who were supposed to protect the people may instead become their oppressors, as if shepherds who rear dogs to protect their flocks were to train the dogs in such a way that they turn into wolves.¹¹ But, says Socrates,

Text 6

“if the Guardians acquire private land, houses and money, they’ll become hostile dictators instead of allies of the people, they’ll live their whole life hating and being hated, plotting and targeted by plotters, more afraid of the enemies at home than of the enemies abroad, and running themselves and the whole city to ruin at once.”¹²

Adeimantus observes that this austere communal lifestyle puts the Guardians at a disadvantage compared to the ordinary working folk, who have money to give dinner parties and enjoy life. Socrates agrees. The Guardians can’t have dinner parties; they have no money to spend on their mistresses; they have no foreign holidays, and no money to spend on other luxuries. In Adeimantus’s eyes this is a topsy turvy state, because the leaders and bosses have less fun than the people they are in charge of. That idea seemed bonkers to Adeimantus and it probably seems bonkers to most people today.

It’s not clear what Socrates’ answer is. He seems, initially, to concede that the Guardians do have a poor deal, as regards their personal happiness. He says that this is a necessary sacrifice on their part, because it’s essential for the general well being (as we saw in Text 6) that those in power should not be exposed to envy or malice. So he seems to be saying that the personal happiness of the most powerful section of society is sacrificed for the general good.

But this is not the answer we should expect, nor the one we should accept, I submit. We should not accept it, because it unthinkingly goes along with Adeimantus’s mistaken idea that what the Guardians are losing is something truly worth having. It accepts Adeimantus’s idea that what they are gaining, the gold and silver in the soul, can’t be a source of happiness or well-being. Instead of accepting Socrates’ answer, we should question Adeimantus’s values. Is not what the

¹¹ 416a.

¹² 417a-b.

Guardians get, in this topsy-turvy political thought experiment, something of supreme value? Something that outstrips anything that money can buy?

It may be that the true answer to whether the Guardians can be personally happy cannot emerge at this early stage of the *Republic*, where Socrates is primarily concerned with providing an army-cum-police-force, not a group of intellectuals. The *Republic* falls into two quite distinct halves, modelled respectively on two quite different historical antecedents, as I shall go on to suggest. At this stage, we are still in what we might call the Spartan city. We have not yet divided the gold and the silver career paths. We are not asking yet about what there is of supreme value that those on the gold path will be offered instead of dinner parties. The values are still those of Sparta.

Socrates probably thinks that the auxiliaries, devoted to physical defence of the state, do not really gain something of supreme value in the exercise of their duty. He does not envisage that physical training is a desirable end of greater value than anything that money could buy. Yet this must be what counts as success for them. If these auxiliaries were to be happy in their role, it would have to be because exercising their physical and moral strength is a good thing. Probably we could accept that it is indeed so, if we think about how such a life of caring and protecting can be satisfying. And we might agree that such a perfect life might indeed be somewhat undermined by monetary rewards, if that implies that acting for the good of others is not something one could choose for its own sake. But Plato does not attend much to the self-giving love and care that might be motivational as an end in itself for those who follow a Silver path in life.

So I think that he is thinking of the auxiliaries, when he suggests that their prescribed career involves sacrificing their personal happiness. He seems to grant that a life with material resources would be more personally fulfilling for them. It is forbidden not because it is not attractive but because of the risk of envy and malice.

By contrast, later in the book, when Socrates is thinking about philosopher rulers, the situation is rather different. Their intellectual training leads them to achievements that Socrates thinks have genuine and intrinsic value, not just instrumental value for the preservation of the community. The philosophical life has real value in Plato's eyes, and is expected to be thrilling for those who follow it, in a

way that nothing else could ever be thrilling. Socrates is experimenting with the idea that pure knowledge might be the highest goal. On that supposition, it follows that what the philosophers gain is better than anything that anyone might ever attain, or that any amount of ordinary gold might buy. So it would be absurd to think that by lacking the money to do something else, they are deprived of something worth having. It seems to me therefore that Socrates ought eventually to be able to say that the gold souls lose nothing that they could ever want or desire by having no money for dinners or whoring or foreign holidays.

But this answer would become available only later in the *Republic*, when we understand why the gold in the soul is the best thing one could ever have. It is not immediately available, nor plausible, at the earlier stage, when we consider the rewards available for the military trainees. Nor does it fit with the Spartan part of the book.

Adeimantus is right that the idea of leaving the rulers and guardians in poverty and austerity is topsy-turvy. But it is topsy-turny, not because Plato was ignoring the rules economic theory, nor because he did not know about the effects of competition and incentives, profit margins, bonuses and rewards. On the contrary, he is precisely thinking about those things. And he is saying, "Suppose we changed all that, and divorced power from the ability to deliver financial advantages: what then?"

I think that Plato is right to suggest that where political power is linked to personal wealth and private property, the desire for wealth will lead others to compete for power, and to defraud the people rather than defend them. In Plato's imaginary system, it is the least powerful who are the most wealthy (in conventional money). The least wealthy in conventional money are the most wealthy in the immaterial goods. But these immaterial goods might be way more important for a flourishing society, Plato suggests.

Plato's conclusions about what gets destroyed by money are telling: it is not just that good and trustworthy leadership can be destroyed when the leaders are allowed to accumulate private wealth (so that the leaders trained to be guard dogs turn into ravening wolves, as he says in Text 3), but also that a certain kind of motivation is lost: namely the motivation to do what is best because it is best; and

also a certain kind of care: the care of a craftsman who tries to make the best job he can of what he is making. Socrates observes, in Text 7, that both too much wealth and too little wealth undermine craft:¹³ if a man is in abject poverty he cannot buy good materials, and hence however good his skills and his will, the products that he makes will be shoddy and unsatisfying.¹⁴ Though he wanted to do better, he was prevented by poverty. On the other hand, if a man has too much wealth, and comes to value that above his own products, he will lose interest in the craft and in the quality of his products; he will become lazy and unmotivated.¹⁵ So even among the working people excessive wealth can corrupt good intentions, even the good intentions of a craftsman who once cared about whether what he made was the best it could be. And the same is true of bankers and investors and stock-market advisors. The ethics of careful craftsmanship, with the motive to deliver products that have genuine value, and to invest in capital projects that are genuinely beneficial and not destructive or exploitative, this craftsman mentality is easily lost, when the desire to make or do something fine is replaced by the desire to go home a whole lot wealthier than your neighbour, or worse still, by finding that you have a shed load of wealth already.

3 *Pythagoras and Southern Italy*

Plato's political thought experiment was not without precedent. In fact I believe that there was a precedent that was not just a thought experiment but a living experiment, of such phenomenal success that it probably inspired Plato with many of his ideas and institutions.

It is often supposed that the institutions in the *Republic* are modelled on the highly conservative and archaic institutions that survived at Sparta. Sparta was a military regime in which the elite citizens were banned from engaging in trade and commerce, and were trained for military service. The elite citizens shared a common table in their assigned regimental club. The eponymous Spartan way of life idealised

¹³ 421d-e.

¹⁴ 421d13.

¹⁵ 421d9.

austerity over luxury. And, as in Plato's city, all the productive labour was done by other classes. In Sparta, though not in Plato, there was a subject labour force who had no political rights and were only partly free, if at all.

Was Plato inspired by this military powerhouse? "Yes" is the standard answer. For instance we read on Wikipedia (fount of all wisdom) the following under "Laconophilia":

Some of the young men who were followers of Socrates had been Laconophiles. Socrates himself is portrayed as having often praised the laws of Sparta and Crete. ... Plato also, in his writings, seems to prefer a Spartan-type regime over a democratic one.

Well, of course there are many similarities, especially in the part of the book that we have just been examining. That is why I have called that part of the work the Spartan part of the *Republic*. The preference for a certain kind of austerity, the common refectories for the Guardians, and their exclusion from commerce and monetary gain are all recognisable as features of Sparta (though, as we shall see, not just of Sparta). But I suspect that the resemblance to Sparta in this part of the work may be a cunning joke on Plato's part. Perhaps he is deliberately sounding like a Laconophile, so as to capture the attention of his listeners, many of them doubtless Laconophiles. The listeners in Socrates' audience are, among others, members of Plato's rather oligarchically inclined family. So at the beginning, in books 2 to 4, Socrates starts to describe a society that sounds uncannily like Sparta. The Laconophiles among us are lulled into a false sense of security. We think that we know where this discussion is going.

But that is a temporary illusion. As the conversation proceeds, this Spartan-style military regime is radically transformed into a philosophical one. Intellectual prowess, not physical training, is what is to give this society its success. And its success is not going to be defined by its power or landed wealth, as Sparta's was, but by its moral and intellectual wealth, and above all its justice and well-being. The book is carefully constructed so that what seemed at first like a familiar description of a Spartan regime, devoted to austerity in order to produce good soldiers, turns out (once the audience has been apprized of the role and importance of philosophy) to become a regime that is devoted to austerity in order to produce good thinkers. By Book 6 we begin to realise that this is not Sparta after all, but something else.

What is it then? My suggestion is that it is not Sparta but Croton. In setting up his philosopharchy, with its focus on the idea that friends have all things in common, and that what is mine is yours too, Plato was surely thinking of the Pythagorean states of Southern Italy. In the late sixth century, Pythagoras fled from the island of Samos, where—so we are told— a new dictator was making the environment hostile to philosophy.¹⁶ When he arrived in Croton in Southern Italy, after perhaps stopping at Delphi on the way, he set about reforming Croton in some way, possibly improving its military discipline, possibly improving its moral condition, certainly becoming influential in its political organisation. Within about ten to twenty years, he and his followers occupied all the most influential leadership positions, not only in Croton itself but also in a whole tranche of other cities in the region.

It is hard to discover from the sources exactly what the Pythagoreans' key to success was, or what their political approach was. Modern scholars, obsessed with the only distinctions they can think of, between aristocracy and democracy, landed wealth versus commerce, and conservative versus progressive, have typically tried to characterise Pythagoras' policies as conservative and aristocratic.¹⁷ The same thing has often happened when historians and political thinkers try to explain what Plato's political views were.

¹⁶ Porphyry V.P. 9; 16; Strabo XIV 638 (citing Timaeus of Tauromenium, 4th Century BC historian). Iamblichus places the departure from Samos later. See Kurt von Fritz, *Pythagorean Politics in Southern Italy: an analysis of the sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 47-57.

¹⁷ See Edwin L Minar, *Early Pythagorean Politics in Practice and Theory* (Baltimore: Waverley Press, 1942), vi-vii and chapter 2, citing A Krische, *De Societatis a Pythagora in urbe Crotoniatarum condita scopo politico* (Göttingen, 1830) and W.A. Oldfather, 'Pythagoras on Individual Differences and the Authoritarian Principle', *Classical Journal*, 33 (1938), 537-9, against a minority represented by John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (4th Edition 1930 edn.; London, 1892/1930), G Thomson, *The Oresteia of Aeschylus*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1938), 349 and G Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens* (London, 1941), 210-19 (who had suggested that Pythagorean politics was mildly democratic).

But I think it is clear that, like Plato, Pythagoras was doing something completely different and far more radical, something that has nothing to do with the traditional set up—in which wealth always coincides with power, and there is always a struggle between those whose wealth comes from commerce, and those who inherit wealth and influence from a powerful family. I think that scholars have mistaken Pythagoras' philosopharchy for aristocracy, as they often do with Plato's.

It seems that the first thing that Pythagoras did was to separate the children from their parents and start to make them think about another set of values, that had nothing to do with competing for financial gain. This idea of starting with the children itself is echoed in Plato's suggestion about how one might begin to set up the *Republic* in practice.¹⁸ All the sources agree that when Pythagoras arrived in Croton, his impact was dramatic and pervasive. Diogenes Laertius has just this to say:

Text 8

... He set sail for Croton. And there he legislated for the Italians, and was greatly honoured together with his disciples. They numbered something approaching 300 and they ran the city in the best possible way, so that the constitution was more or less literally "an aristocracy".¹⁹

But Porphyry, following Dicaearchus, has a more elaborate legend:

Text 9

When he disembarked in Italy and arrived in Croton, so Dicaearchus says,²⁰ they were struck by his appearance: he had the look of a gentleman of liberal birth, with a gracious and orderly manner, voice and everything, and he seemed like someone well-travelled, naturally blessed by fortune and remarkably gifted in every way. Such an effect did he have on the city of Crotonians that when he had inspired the council of elder statesmen that was in charge of the city, by presenting a range of admirable ideas to them, the rulers then appointed him to deliver a youth mission

¹⁸ *Republic* VII, 540e5-541a7.

¹⁹ D.L. VIII 3.

²⁰ Dicaearchus, pupil of Aristotle, late 4th Century, contemporary of Aristoxenus. Fragments collected in William Fortenbaugh and E Schütrumpf, eds, *Dicaearchus of Messana: Text, Translation, and Discussion*. (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2001). His attitude to Pythagoras is sceptical, emphasising the charismatic personality. See Huffman in Huffman.

programme to the adolescents. And after that he was asked to address the children from the schools all congregated together, and then the women. Even a meeting of women was fixed up for him.

Porphry V.P. 18

In Dicaearchus' imagination, Pythagoras' influence flowed from a charismatic personality, though I suspect that he probably arrived with some token of authority from the oracle of Apollo at Delphi.²¹

If the traditional dating is right Pythagoreans were the leading political influence in Croton and its regional cities for about 80 years after Pythagoras' arrival. But what exactly was their role? We are faced with a persistent difficulty, of disentangling stories about the Pythagorean "brotherhood"—an inner circle who studied arcane matters, shared some kind of secret passwords, perhaps a coenobitic life— from information concerning the influence that Pythagorean political leaders had on a larger community, the whole city of Croton, and the subsequent alliance of cities in Southern Italy. It is implausible to imagine the whole population joining the Pythagorean philosophical circle.²² What, then, was the wider political role of Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans?²³ Was the society structured somewhat like Plato's, with on the one hand a coenobitic community of scholar-philosophers, and on the other a separate garrison of military guardians, with the rest of the population living a normal life under the moral instruction of the leaders? The idea seems plausible.

First let us sketch the political situation when Pythagoras arrived. It is widely thought that he came to Croton shortly after Croton was defeated by Locri at the Battle of the Sagra river, conventionally dated circa 530 BC.²⁴ Justinus (epitomising

²¹ For the argument to this effect see my paper in Huffman.

²² On the Pythagorean way of life, see [chapter 6 in this volume](#).

²³ For more detail on the historical evidence for this period see Minar, *Early Pythagorean Politics in Practice and Theory*, Ch. 3: I dispute Minar's interpretation, particularly his insistence that the Pythagoreans were aristocratic and reactionary in their political leanings.

²⁴ Strabo 261, 263; Justinus XX 2.10-3.9. Peter Bicknell, 'The date of the battle of the Sagra river', *Phoenix*, 20 (1966), 294-301 argues for a much earlier dating

Trogus) suggests that Pythagoras revives their Crotonians' morale in the aftermath of that defeat:

Text 10

After this the Crotonians lost their interest in the exercise of military prowess or arms. For they hated the arms that they had taken up with such bad luck; and had Pythagoras the philosopher not been there, they would have given their life over to luxury... Having studied under all these [sc. the Egyptians, Babyonians etc] Pythagoras came to Croton and by his authority recalled the citizens from the luxury they had fallen into, bringing them back to frugal ways. Every day he praised excellence...

Justinus XX 4. 1-3, 5-6.

Justinus sees the city's post-traumatic disillusionment as the context for Pythagoras' mission, and thinks that the aim was to motivate the young men and boys to military enterprise.

If Justinus is right,²⁵ Croton would evidently have lost a generation of young men in the disastrous battle of Sagra, less than a decade before Pythagoras arrived. The citizens are now reluctant to risk provoking war; a whole generation of youth has been raised with a desire to enjoy life while they can, and not to follow their lost brothers into battle. Matching the lost generation of boys would be a generation of young women without husbands or potential husbands. It makes sense that Pythagoras needed to engage the women, and the younger children of both sexes, in raising aspirations.²⁶ The sources suggest that he held assemblies of women and of children, each group separately but each with a role to play.

Besides this attention to women and children, we hear of young men flocking to join up with Pythagoras. Joining the clique apparently committed the member to a special kind of friendship, sharing of personal property, secrecy and a variety of special rituals or passwords whereby the members could identify who did or didn't

(570s) using material from Theopompus found in *Suda: Phormio*. For further questions on chronology see below, note 45

²⁵ For other options see below.

²⁶ On women see further below.

belong.²⁷ These details tell us little about what the recruits would have learned, or how it might bear on politics in Croton or in other cities where, eventually, they obtained positions of power and influence.

As I have mentioned, I do not find it helpful to think of the emergence (or decline) of Pythagorean influence in the traditional terms used for describing political conflict. The emergence of Pythagorean politics in Southern Italy was not a coup or a revolution. It was probably a creeping enthusiasm for certain ideas and ideals. How would Pythagorean thinking have come to replace the earlier approach to government? If, as seems likely, the 2000 followers who joined, with wives and children, after Pythagoras' first speech,²⁸ were mainly younger citizens, rather than serving Council members, then we can imagine that Pythagorean ideas would have spread upwards, partly as younger men became elders in their family, and partly as their attitudes and values spread to others, not just the wealthy but also ordinary citizens, thereby changing the rulers' options for internal policy. Similarly, as Pythagorean groups emerged elsewhere in the region, their greater loyalty to the Pythagorean way of life than to their separate poleis, and their pact of *philia* towards fellow members, would facilitate the growth of an alliance among the cities of Magna Graecia.²⁹ Not that this happened entirely without violence, however.

Probably Croton remained an oligarchy under Pythagorean influence and beyond. But this need not mean that the Pythagoreans favoured aristocratic

²⁷ See [Chapter 6 in Huffman](#).

²⁸ Porphyry VP 20, citing Nicomachus (1st Century A.D. Pythagorean mathematician, whose biography of Pythagoras is used by Porphyry and Iamblichus). See Walter Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, trans. E.L. Minar Jr (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), 98-99.

²⁹ Porphyry VP 20 seems to use the term "Magna Graecia", normally used to refer generally to the Greek colonies in southern Italy, to mean the voluntary adherence of members to the Pythagorean discipleship and community living, as though it named the Pythagorean political alliance. On the league of cities see below.

oligarchy over other systems.³⁰ The Pythagoreans can hardly favour "aristocracy", if "aristocracy" makes property a criterion for influence. For, by all accounts, Pythagoreans owned no private property, lived a life of simple frugality, and promoted non-materialist values among both themselves and those they governed. Joining meant handing over one's entire wealth, for five years probation. Only if not admitted to full membership after five years could one reclaim the property.³¹ A Pythagorean considers nothing *idion* (private): for friends everything is *koinon* (common).³² So private property would be no mark of esteem or qualification for government, but rather the reverse. When Diogenes remarks, in Text 4, that the three hundred disciples who ran the city "in the best possible way" constituted *literally* an "aristocracy", he means *neither* that they were, *nor* that they were *not* promoting aristocracy: he means that they ruled well.³³ Surely Pythagoras' age-related *hetaireiai*, his distribution of cult duties by age rather than inherited priesthods, and his confiscation of members' property, precisely preclude inherited status. Again the egalitarian aims of Plato's myth of the metals come to mind.³⁴

These egalitarian ideals—against privilege, private property, depravity, hostility; for equality of opportunity, communism, the life of the mind and virtuous friendship—can we square these ideals with the history of Southern Italy after Pythagoras' arrival? Two key events are, first, Croton's defeat of Sybaris,³⁵ and, second, Croton's dominance in an unusual political and monetary league of cities.

³⁰ Pace Minar, *Early Pythagorean Politics in Practice and Theory* .

³¹ D.L. 8.10; on issues of the monetary value of property see below.

³² D.L. 8.23. See above, n. **Error! Bookmark not defined..**

³³ D.L. 8.3.

³⁴ Plato's system for eliminating inherited privilege has been similarly misunderstood by those who use a simple-minded dichotomy between "elitist" and "egalitarian" political systems. An egalitarian system to facilitate equality of opportunity will reject existing criteria of privilege, but have its own criteria to select an elite by merit.

³⁵ Probably 510 BC, but see further below.

The latter fits well with the idea canvassed here, of a spreading undercurrent of allegiance, as Pythagoreans with an overriding loyalty to each other increasingly dominated neighbouring cities. Of this period, Iamblichus writes:

Text II

It is said, then, that on moving to Italy and Sicily, he found those cities enslaved to one another—some for many years, and other just recently. By filling these cities with thoughts of freedom by way of his "hearers" in each city, he pulled them back and made them free: Croton and Sybaris and Catania and Rhegium and Himera and Acragas and Tauromenium and some others, for which he established laws through Charondas of Catania and Zaleucus of Locri. As a result of these laws these cities were the most well-provisioned legally and the most worthy of admiration for those dwelling in the vicinity, for a long time. He completely removed civil strife and rival views and difference of opinion, not just among his own associates and their offspring during several generations (as is recorded) but also generally from all the cities in Italy and Sicily, both in terms of their internal affairs and in their relations with the other cities.

Iamblichus *VP* 33-4.³⁶

Text II supports my suggestion that the Pythagorean "revolution" was more philosophical than political. People came from afar to enrol, and to invite Pythagorean communities into their city. Such non-violent change side-steps conventional categories like tyranny, oligarchy, aristocracy and democracy; likewise it eludes standard models of revolution and regime-change. Immaterial ideas, values and allegiance spread by contagion, not by power, force or military success.

Croton's conquest of the notoriously wealthy city of Sybaris is harder to square with this picture. Roughly ten years after Pythagoras arrived, according to the standard chronology, Croton defeated Sybaris at the river Traeis. Not content with victory, they then massacred the survivors, flooded the city and killed the civilians.³⁷ This genocide became a byword in the history of hostility of Greek against Greek.

³⁶ Iamblichus' source is probably Nicomachus. Cf Porphyry *VP* 21-22. Porphyry continues "When Simmichus the dictator of Centuripa heard him, he laid aside his dictatorship and he gave some of his property to his sister and some to the citizens." (*VP* 21).

³⁷ Sources for these events include Diodorus Siculus XII 9.3; Strabo VI.1.13; Herodotus V.44; Athenaeus *Deipn.* XII 521e-f. Some cite the lack of archaeological

Was this what Pythagoras had taught them to do? Diodorus, placing the battle in 510 BC,³⁸ explains it thus: the new despot in Sybaris demands the return and execution of some refugees, presumably his political opponents, who are seeking asylum in the agora at Croton—probably at the shrine of Hera.³⁹ Croton must choose: betray the suppliants, or protect them and expect retaliation. At first they favour betrayal, but they are then converted to the nobler choice by Pythagoras. This leads to hostilities. After a surprising victory, given their small army, the Crotoniates, angry and triumphant, kill everyone, instead of taking prisoners of war.⁴⁰

There is nothing here about ideological conflicts between democrats and aristocrats, or commerce and gentry.⁴¹ Diodorus' mentions no such ideologies,⁴² but speaks of moral motivation: whether to betray suppliants at Hera's altar, zealous hatred of a demonised enemy and so on. Such explanations, in terms of human psychology, are compatible with seeing Pythagoras as Croton's moral conscience rather than its political leader.⁴³

traces of Sybaris to support the genocide story (but see below on later references to "Sybaris").

³⁸ Diodorus Siculus XII 9.3.

³⁹ See note 45 for implied offence to Hera.

⁴⁰ D.S. XII 10.1

⁴¹ For explanations deploying these concepts see Minar, *Early Pythagorean Politics in Practice and Theory*, 12-14.

⁴² Minar finds support where Diodorus' describes the dictator (Telys) as a demagogue and the exiles as *megistoi andres* and *euporotatoi*. D.S. XII 9.2. But surely Diodorus simply means that Telys bought the people's support by confiscating wealth from some fat cats and distributing it to the rest. It says nothing about what existing support he had—arguably it implies that he did not already have popular support—, nor whether the fat cats were traditional gentry or commercial types.

⁴³ In Athenaeus the Sybarites had not only killed Telys' opponents, but also some Crotoniate ambassadors, and had established some extravagant games to

If this still seems too violent for Pythagoras to have been responsible, we could experiment with an alternative chronology. Suppose that what prompted Pythagoras to begin his teaching was the moral decline associated with Croton's victory over Sybaris, not by falling morale after the defeat at Sagra River, as Justinus had suggested⁴⁴ His teaching on friendship, and not punishing in anger, might be measures to prevent a repeat of such atrocities, to replace rivalry with collaboration, substitute common frugality for competitive consumption, and devise a politics of friendship and humane justice: all corrections to the arrogance resulting from a magnificent defeat of the world's most gluttonous city. This otherwise speculative hypothesis finds support in Athenaeus (following Timaeus), who says that Croton became decadent *after* defeating Sybaris,⁴⁵ not after losing at Sagra River, and that Pythagoras' mission to Croton came *after*, not *before*, the destruction of Sybaris.

Either chronology makes sense. Perhaps we could even combine them, if Pythagoras has to add new measures to curb the zeal resulting from his first revival of piety.

Women and philosophy.

We have mentioned that Pythagoras chose to speak not just to men and boys, but also to women. They too would have a role in moral support,⁴⁶ and also in the renewal of cult.

Pythagoras apparently introduced a combined sanctuary for the Muses, to regularise an earlier plurality of separate cults.⁴⁷ It is not clear why, though a connection with Pythagorean interests in music is tempting.

undermine the Olympics. These crimes cause Hera to vomit bile in the agora, and a fountain of blood (XII 522a).

⁴⁴ See above, note 24.

⁴⁵ Athenaeus XII 522a.

⁴⁶ In Iamblichus VP 54 wives are to take pride in letting the husband win an argument.

In Iamblichus' account, Pythagoras urges women to avoid animal sacrifice, to offer frugal home-baked goods, and to take their offerings to the sanctuary in person, not by sending a slave. He pictures Pythagoras reviving old-fashioned values, with time-honoured domestic and religious roles for men and women. But should we not prefer a different picture, in which Pythagoras has a quite revolutionary and unconventional effect? Notice a widespread tradition whereby Pythagoras did not just teach women to be faithful wives, but made them part of an intellectual project.⁴⁸ As ever, it is hard to separate evidence about polis structures from accounts of the inner Pythagorean circle, but Iamblichus (VP 56, following Timaeus, it seems)⁴⁹ says that Pythagoras created an age-related cursus for women, identifying them with different deities at different stages of their lives (based on some arcane interest in the meaning of names). A woman starts as a *kore* when unmarried, becomes a *nymphē* when betrothed, a *meter* when producing children, and *maia* (a Doric dialect term) when her child has children.⁵⁰ What might such life-stage-groupings be for? Were they to privilege those with children and grandchildren over the childless? To encourage competitive virtue within each category? To distribute cult and ritual duties to different age groups? To provide support and opportunities for unmarried girls and childless widows in the aftermath of war? To assign identities and roles by age or experience, not social status or wealth? While some of these (particularly the first) could be ways to reinforce traditional aristocratic values, others (especially the last two) would be radical egalitarian projects. So which is the better reconstruction? If I am right that Pythagoras is in the background of Plato's model city, this adds support for the idea that the project was not a reactionary

⁴⁷ Iamblichus V.P. 45. Cf VP 264 (from Apollonius) where a Pythagorean revival is marked by public sacrifice at "the shrine to the Muses established by Pythagoras"; and D.L. VIII 40. See Pierre Boyancé, *Le culte des muses chez les philosophes grecs* (Paris: Boccard, 1937).

⁴⁸ Porphyry VP 19.

⁴⁹ See also Diogenes Laertius 8.11.

⁵⁰ D.L. 8.10 describes a similar fourfold division of life for males in terms of seasons of the year.

attempt to put women back in the home, but a radical attempt to give women a range of other options.

Another tradition names some women who held important positions in this sequence of sacralised life-stages: Porphyry (*VP* 4, based on Timaeus) says that Pythagoras' daughter "led the girls in Croton" and his wife led the wives. Since these were educated women, "leading the girls" etc might not just mean leading cult or maidenly duties, but might identify the girl's rank among students; or her role as an instructor for the women's class. Some sayings are attributed to Theano, his wife,⁵¹ concerning modesty and ritual purity around sexual intercourse.⁵² She is also said to have written "some things" (unlike her son, Telauges).⁵³ Diogenes and Iamblichus give the name Damo for their daughter,⁵⁴ and Bitale for a granddaughter (Damo's daughter, later Telauges' wife—Telauges being much younger than Damo, and raised by Theano after Pythagoras' death).⁵⁵ Much of this must be legend, but the names seem to be authentic, and the tradition that Telauges taught Empedocles fits the chronology, if nothing else.⁵⁶

So in Pythagoras's Croton, and in the neighbouring cities that belonged to the same league of cities in southern Italy, we find a society that made friendship the

⁵¹ Diogenes Laertius attributes both to Theano. Iamblichus attributes one to Pythagoras (*VP* 55), the other to "Deino, wife of Brontinos" though he knows another tradition ascribing it to Theano (*VP* 132). Some traditions evidently made Pythagoras celibate, and Theano or Deino the wife or daughter of Brontinus.

⁵² D.L. 8.43. The point of the remark that "when she puts on her shame again, after removing it for intercourse, she puts on what makes her a woman" is probably that apart from womanly modesty, which is a superficial mark of gender, there is no real distinction between a man and a woman.

⁵³ D.L. 8.43.

⁵⁴ D.L. 8.42.

⁵⁵ Iamblichus *VP* 146.

⁵⁶ See the allegedly spurious verse of Empedocles, DK 31B155, quoted by D.L.

supreme value, in such a way that competition for resources and conflict over possessions would be replaced by a total absence of possessiveness. The expression "for friends everything is shared" (*koina ta ton philon*) which is used repeatedly by Plato, in the *Republic* and elsewhere, seems to have been a catch phrase of the Pythagorean society, from which, presumably, Plato must have got it.⁵⁷ And similarly the idea that people do not call different things "mine", but that everyone says "mine" of the same things. As people have noted, when Plato prescribes years of training in geometry and harmonics for those who are training to be leaders in the *Republic*, he appears to be adopting the schedule of training traditionally associated with Pythagorean mathematicians and philosophers. Once you think about it, Plato's idea looks to be riddled with Pythagorean-inspired institutions. Of course there is a risk because the sources from which we learn of Pythagoras's activities in Croton are all later than Plato. and they may have embellished their accounts with Platonic material, but it is far more likely that Plato's idea of a training in geometry and a residential community of philosophers engaged in speculative astronomy and politics as part of the same endeavour was inspired by Pythagoras's extraordinary political regime in southern Italy, than by Sparta, and it is far more likely that Plato acquired the idea from something in Pythagoras's project, than that the sources wrote it into Pythagorean legend after Plato (particularly as in order to find it in Pythagoras we have to peel off a layer of interpretation that positively conceals these Platonic themes under a layer of misinformation).

⁵⁷ κοινὰ τὰ τῶν φίλων. Plato *Republic* 424a, 449c5. Cf *Phaedrus* 279c; *Lysis* 207c10; *Critias* 112e10; *Laws* 739c2-d5. See Timaeus apud Diogenes Laertius VIII 10, Schol in Platonis *Phaedrum* 279, and Iamblichus V.P. XVIII 81; Fritz, *Pythagorean Politics in Southern Italy: an analysis of the sources*, 35, 39. Porphyry V.P. 33 attributes to Pythagoras both κοινὰ τὰ τῶν φίλων and ὁ φίλος ἄλλος ἑαυτός (the friend is another self). Iamblichus V.P. XXIX, 167 traces the notion of "calling the same things 'mine' and 'not mine'" (*Republic* 462c) to the Pythagorean model. For resistance to these themes see J.A. Philip, *Pythagoras and early Pythagoreanism* (Phoenix Supplementary Volumes; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), 140-1 and Peter Garnsey, 'Pythagoras, Plato and communality: a note', *Hermathena*, 179 (2005), 77-87 (who ignores Plato's emphasis on shared property).

Did the Pythagorean project in Croton work? It seems that there was a period of flourishing political and monetary collaboration in the region for about 70 years. With a few minor hiccups, the Pythagoreans held control not just of Croton itself, but also of all the cities nearby, until they were assassinated in an arson attack in the mid fifth century, after a long period of stability and prosperity. The coinage of the region suggests that the otherwise independent cities were working together, with a common currency and mutual exchange. It was something like the EU, except that it wasn't. It was more successful. Every city flourished. And the reason for this seems to be that the friendship between the leaders in the cities—the friendship of Pythagorean brother to Pythagorean brother— was more powerful and bonded them more strongly than any economic motives towards competition or rivalry that might cause them to fall into hostility. It was that kind of friendship, and that kind of political harmony, that Plato had in mind when urged that the key to political success for his city was that friends must have all things in common.

4 *Reflections.*

Both Pythagoras and Plato deliberately remove monetary rewards and all other material bonuses from public life, and replace them with benefits calculated by a quite different measure of worth: with, for instance, the freedom to pursue the things they love best, including—for those who care about such things— abstract enquiry, wisdom and understanding, or equal conversation among like-minded friends uncontaminated by rivalry or competition.

On the one hand this anticipates a standard economic observation frequently attributed to Aristotle (but actually much older), that exchange value depends upon needs and the ability to use the commodity, and will not be equal among unequals. Because education is of little value to some and of great value to others, it cannot be given a standard price or handed out randomly to all. For, as Heraclitus remarked (Text 12) nearly two centuries before Aristotle,

Donkeys prefer the sweepings from the threshing floor rather than gold.

(Heraclitus. B9).

But more than that, Plato and Pythagoras remind us that some things are precious in a way that money can't measure, and indeed money can't buy, because buying it ruins it. Among these goods are friendship, love, loyalty, trust and wisdom.

For these things there is no law of diminishing utility. Which means that these things are the only goods that are unqualifiedly worth having and always having more of. But an economy based on monetary rewards for supposed "success" systematically perverts the value system by promoting above all else the means for destroying trust, equality, love, wisdom and the other rewards that maintain their value without diminishing returns.

Plato was probably following Pythagoras when he said that what causes conflict and unease in a community is when one person says "mine" about one thing and another says "mine" about something else. Aristotle thought that this was nonsense. He responded, as many capitalists would today, by arguing that people care more about what is their own, and less about communal or publicly owned goods.

But this is too quick. Plato is not talking about publicly owned things—about which we would surely say "ours" rather than "mine". Plato is reminding us that it is actually possible in some other cases for us to care about things that we share, and for each of us to regard them equally as our own, and to say "mine" not "ours" about them. These are not shared things in the sense of public ownership. To name some familiar examples where we use "Mine" in just Plato's way, we typically speak of "my team" in referring to the football team that we support, or "my university" of the place where we studied. We say "my mother" and "my Aunt" and this does not at all mean that they are not also someone else's mother or Aunt. We say "my daughter", not meaning to say that there is no other parent whom she will say "mine" in return about. She is "my" daughter and I am "her" parent. This is not a kind of ownership.

When two of us both identify something as "mine" in this way, we also care for each other. In these cases we are pleased, not offended, by finding someone else who says "mine" of the same football team or is an alumnus of the same university, whereas when someone else says "mine" of our private property we become possessive and deny that it is theirs at all. So there are two kinds of possession or belonging expressed by the term "mine", and there is a massive difference between them in what the effects are for cohesion among the group who feel attachment to that thing. It is a sad thing about our society and much superficial political thought that it has no grasp of the difference between ownership and belonging. My aunt is

not mine to dispose of or sell, but she does belong to me and I care about her. The same with my body.

So our shared loyalty to something that we both call "mine" typically motivates us to endeavour jointly to support it, not to compete or withdraw and leave it to others. We do not withdraw our loyalty to the football team just because someone else is also a keen supporter. Arguably there are limits, as explored by sociologists, to the size of the group that can feel shared belonging and maintain a level of commitment; and possibly there also needs to be some other, distant if not nearby, that is not the one we are loyal to. It is not clear whether we can have global belonging (though the idea of a shared planet is not far from this notion). Nevertheless, the phenomenon is apparent and is a counter-example to the claim that the only thing that motivates us to commitment and enthusiasm is private ownership and individual rewards or benefits. In fact the institutions in question, such as a team or a school or a parent, are not owned at all by the group who regards them as "mine". And the same goes for "my country" and "my religion". Yet typically those who feel that way about them will willingly to put some, or indeed all, of their private wealth into supporting those concerns, even though they do not own them nor any of their achievements and goals.

When we say "mine" in this sense we do not express ownership but a relation of care and responsibility. These relations seem to me to be some of the most important ones for economics to keep in mind. And they are the way that Pythagoras and Plato thought one could make for a different kind of society, where economic motivations were not the incentives involved. And, it seems, Pythagoras made it work. It would be nice to know how.

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