

Plato's Academy: A Survey of the Evidence
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PYTHAGOREANISM IN THE EARLY ACADEMY: THE QUESTION OF APPROPRIATION



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I. THEOPHRASTUS ON PLATO AND THE PYTHAGOREANS (METAPHYSICS 11A6-B12)

Plato and the Pythagoreans make the distance [between the first principles and everything else] a great one, and they make all things desire to imitate fully; and yet, they set up a certain opposition, as it were, between the Indefinite Dyad and the One. In the former [resides] the Unlimited and the Unordered and, as it were, all Shapelessness as such; and they make it altogether impossible for the nature of the universe to exist without this [that is, the Indefinite Dyad] – it [that is, the Indefinite Dyad] could only have an equal share in things, or even exceed, the other [first principle, that is, the One] – whereby they also make their first principles contrary [to one another]. Therefore, those who ascribe causation to god claim that not even god is able to reduce all things to the best, but, even if at all, only insofar as is possible. And perhaps he wouldn't even choose to, if indeed it were to result in the destruction of all existence, given that it [that is, existence] is constituted from contraries and consists of contraries.

Πλάτων δὲ καὶ οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι μακρὰν τὴν ἀπόστασιν, ἐπιμιεῖσθαι τ' ἐθέλειν ἅπαντα· καίτοι καθάπερ ἀντίθεσιν τινα ποιοῦσιν τῆς ἀορίστου δυάδος καὶ τοῦ ἑνός, ἐν ἧ καὶ τὸ ἄπειρον καὶ τὸ ἄτακτον καὶ ὡς εἰπεῖν πᾶσα ἀμορφία καθ' αὐτήν, ὅλως δ' οὐχ οἷον τ' ἄνευ ταύτης τὴν τοῦ ὅλου φύσιν, ἀλλ' οἷον ἰσομοιεῖν ἢ καὶ ὑπερέχειν τῆς ἐτέρας, ἧ καὶ τὰς ἀρχὰς ἐναντίας. διὸ καὶ οὐδὲ τὸν θεόν, ὅσοι τῷ θεῷ τὴν αἰτίαν ἀνάπτουσι, δύνασθαι πάντ' εἰς τὸ ἄριστον ἄγειν, ἀλλ' εἶπερ, ἐφ' ὅσον ἐνδέχεται· τάχα δ' οὐδ' ἂν προέλοιτ', εἶπερ ἀναιρεῖσθαι συμβήσεται τὴν ὅλην οὐσίαν ἐξ ἐναντίων γε καὶ ἐν ἐναντίοις οὔσαν.

**II. APPROPRIATION AS FAMILIARIZATION: ANTISTHENES OF ATHENS ON PYTHAGORAS
POLUTROPOS (PORPHYRY, QUESTIONS ON HOMER'S ODYSSEY 1.1-3.2 SCHRADER = SSR V A 187;
TRANS. AFTER BOYS-STONES AND ROWE)**

This is why Homer says that Odysseus is, as a wise man, a man of many modes, because he knows many modes of intercourse with men. In a similar way, Pythagoras is also said to have crafted his words appropriately when speaking to children, addressing them with child-like speech, and for women, speech appropriate for women; worlds of leadership for leaders, and youthful speech for the young. To discover the mode of wisdom appropriate to each person is the mark of wisdom...

διὰ τοῦτο φησι τὸν Ὀδυσσεῖα Ὅμηρος σοφὸν ὄντα πολύτροπον εἶναι, ὅτι δὴ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἠπίστατο πολλοῖς τρόποις συνεῖναι. οὕτω καὶ Πυθαγόρας λέγεται πρὸς παῖδας ἀξιωθεὶς ποιήσασθαι λόγους διαθεῖναι πρὸς αὐτοὺς λόγους παιδικούς καὶ πρὸς γυναῖκας γυναξιν ἀρμοδίους καὶ πρὸς ἄρχοντας ἀρχοντικούς καὶ πρὸς ἐφήβους ἐφηβικούς. τὸν γὰρ ἐκάστοις πρόσφορον τρόπον τῆς σοφίας ἐξευρίσκειν σοφίας ἐστίν·

**III. APPROPRIATION AS ALLEGORICAL EXEGESIS: ARISTIPPUS OF CYRENE ON PYTHAGORAS'
NAME (D.L. 8.21 = SSR IV A 150)**

...he was named Pythagoras because he, no less than the Pythian, orated the truth.

Πυθαγόραν αὐτὸν ὀνομασθῆναι ὅτι τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἠγόρευεν οὐχ ἥττον τοῦ Πυθίου.

**IV. APPROPRIATION AS CLASSIFICATION AND PRAGMATIC EXPLANATION: ANAXIMANDER OF
MILETUS' EXPLANATION OF THE PYTHAGOREAN SYMBOLS (FGRHIST 9 T 1 = SUDA, S.V.
ΑΝΑΞΙΜΑΝΔΡΟΣ ΑΝΑΞΙΜΑΝΔΡΟΥ)**

[Anaximander] wrote an *Explanation of the Pythagorean Symbols*, of which some examples are, "do not overstep the yoke", "do not poke fire with a knife", "do not eat a loaf of bread whole". etc.

ἔγραψε Συμβόλων Πυθαγορείων Ἐξηγήσιν. οἷόν ἐστι τὸ 'ζυγὸν μὴ ὑπερβαίνειν' 'μαχαίραι πῦρ μὴ σκαλεύειν' ἀπὸ ὀλοκλήρου ἄρτου μὴ ἐσθίειν' καὶ τὰ λοιπά.

**V. HIPPIAS OF ELIS AND COLLECTION OF THE 'MOST IMPORTANT [SAYINGS?]' OF HIS
PREDECESSORS (DK 86 B 6 = CLEM. STROM. 6.15; TRANS. AFTER MANSFELD)**

It may be the case that some of these things have been said briefly by others, each at a different place: some by Orpheus and some by Musaeus, some by Hesiod and some by Homer, some by others among the poets, and some in prose-writings, some by Greeks, and some by non-Greeks.

For my part, I have collected from all these (sources) the most important and kindred [sayings?] in order to compose the present original miscellany.

τούτων ἴσως εἴρηται τὰ μὲν Ὀρφεῖ, τὰ δὲ Μουσαίῳ κατὰ βραχὺ ἄλλωι ἀλλαχοῦ, τὰ δὲ Ἡσιόδωι τὰ δὲ Ὀμήρωι, τὰ δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις τῶν ποιητῶν, τὰ δὲ ἐν συγγραφαῖς τὰ μὲν Ἑλληνισι τὰ δὲ βαρβάροις· ἐγὼ δὲ ἐκ πάντων τούτων τὰ μέγιστα καὶ ὁμόφυλα συνθεῖς τοῦτον καινὸν πολυειδῆ τὸν λόγον ποιήσομαι.

VI. ARISTOTLE'S CLASSIFICATION OF THE PYTHAGOREAN ACUSMATA (IAMBlichus, ON THE PYTHAGOREAN LIFE 82-83; TRANS. AFTER DILLON AND HERSHBELL)

The philosophy of the *acusmatici* consists of *acusmata* undemonstrated, that is, lacking a rationale, e.g. 'one ought to do in this way'; and other *acusmata*, as many as were said by that man [i.e. Pythagoras], these they [i.e. the *acusmatici*] attempt to preserve as the divine doctrines. Neither do they pretend to be speaking for themselves, nor ought one do so, but even among themselves they suppose that those who grasp the most *acusmata* are best situated in regard to practical wisdom. And these so-called 'acusmata' are distinguished into three kinds: some signify 'what is', others 'what is to the greatest degree', and others 'what ought or ought not to be done'. Those that signify 'what is' are of this sort: "what are the islands of the blessed? Sun and moon."; "what is the oracle at Delphi? The *tetraktys* (which is the harmony in which the sirens exist)."

Those [that signify] 'what is to the greatest degree' are, e.g., "what is most just? To sacrifice"; "what is wisest? Number."...[list of 'what is to the greatest degree?' *acusmata*]...These and similar things are the *acusmata* of this kind; for each of them signifies what is to the greatest degree. And this [i.e. philosophy] is the same as that which is called the wisdom of the Seven Sages. For they too sought not what is the good, but what is [good] to the greatest degree; not what is difficult, but what is most difficult (e.g. to know oneself); not what is easy, but what is easiest (e.g. to indulge in habit)...[insertion by Iamblichus?]

Those of the *acusmata* which signify what ought or ought not to be done were of this sort: one ought to beget children (for it is necessary to leave behind people to serve god)...etc.

ἔστι δὲ ἡ μὲν τῶν ἀκουσματικῶν φιλοσοφία ἀκούσματα ἀναπόδεικτα καὶ ἄνευ λόγου, ὅτι οὕτως πρακτέον, καὶ τᾶλλα, ὅσα παρ' ἐκείνου ἐρρέθη, ταῦτα πειρῶνται διαφυλάττειν ὡς θεῖα δόγματα, αὐτοὶ δὲ παρ' αὐτῶν οὔτε λέγειν προσποιοῦνται οὔτε λεκτέον εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτῶν ὑπολαμβάνουσι τούτους ἔχειν βέλτιστα πρὸς φρόνησιν, οἵτινες πλεῖστα ἀκούσματα ἔσχον. πάντα δὲ τὰ οὕτως <καλούμενα> ἀκούσματα διήρηται εἰς τρία εἴδη· τὰ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν τί ἐστι σημαίνει, τὰ δὲ τί μάλιστα, τὰ δὲ τί δεῖ πράττειν ἢ μὴ πράττειν. τὰ μὲν οὖν τί ἐστι τοιαῦτα, οἷον τί ἐστὶν αἱ μακάρων νῆσοι; ἥλιος καὶ σελήνη. τί ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς μαντεῖον; τετρακτύς. ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρμονία, ἐν ἣ αἱ Σειρήνες.

τὰ δὲ τί μάλιστα, οἷον τί τὸ δικαιοτάτον; θύειν. τί τὸ σοφώτατον; ἀριθμός...ταῦτα καὶ τοιαῦτα ἐστὶ τὰ τούτου τοῦ γένους ἀκούσματα· ἕκαστον γὰρ τῶν τοιούτων μάλιστα τί ἐστίν. ἔστι δ' αὕτη ἢ αὐτὴ τῆ τῶν ἐπτὰ σοφιστῶν λεγομένη σοφία. καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖνοι ἐζήτουν, οὐ τί ἐστὶ τὰγαθόν, ἀλλὰ τί μάλιστα· οὐδὲ τί τὸ χαλεπόν, ἀλλὰ τί τὸ χαλεπώτατον (ὅτι τὸ αὐτὸν γνῶναι ἐστίν)· οὐδὲ τί τὸ ῥάδιον, ἀλλὰ τί τὸ ῥᾶστον (ὅτι τὸ ἔθει χρῆσθαι)...

τὰ δὲ τί πρακτέον ἢ οὐ πρακτέον τῶν ἀκουσμάτων τοιαῦτά ἐστίν, οἷον ὅτι δεῖ τεκνοποιεῖσθαι (δεῖ γὰρ ἀντικαταλιπεῖν τοὺς θεραπεύοντας τὸν θεόν)...

VII. ARISTOTLE'S TRIPARTITE DIVISION OF PROPOSITIONS (TOPICS 1.14, 105B19-25)

It is possible to encompass three classes of propositions and problems in a sketch. Some propositions are ethical, some are scientific, and some are logical. Propositions such as these, then, are ethical: "should one obey parents rather than laws, if they are at variance?" Logical propositions are such as, "is knowledge of contraries the same or not?" Scientific propositions are such as, "is the universe eternal or not?" And similarly also with the problems.

ἔστι δ' ὡς τύπῳ περιλαβεῖν τῶν προτάσεων καὶ τῶν προβλημάτων μέρη τρία· αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἠθικαὶ προτάσεις εἰσιν, αἱ δὲ φυσικαί, αἱ δὲ λογικαί. ἠθικαὶ μὲν οὖν αἱ τοιαῦται, οἷον πότερον δεῖ τοῖς γονεῦσι μᾶλλον ἢ τοῖς νόμοις πειθαρχεῖν, ἐὰν διαφωνῶσιν· λογικαὶ δὲ οἷον πότερον τῶν ἐναντίων ἢ αὐτῆ ἐπιστημῆ ἢ οὐ· φυσικαὶ δὲ οἷον πότερον ὁ κόσμος ἀίδιος ἢ οὐ. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τὰ προβλήματα.

VIII. XENOCRATES AND THE TRIPARTITE DIVISION OF PHILOSOPHY (SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, AGAINST THE LOGICIANS 1.16 = XENOCRATES F 82 ISNARDI PARENTE)

These thinkers [i.e. those who hold that philosophy has one or two parts], however, seem to have handled the question deficiently and, in comparison with them, those who say that a part of philosophy is physics, another ethics, and another logic, [seem to have handled the question] more completely. Of these, Plato is a pioneer, [at least] *potentially*, as he made many discussions on many issues of physics and ethics, and not a few on logic; but those associated with Xenocrates, as well as those [who come] from the Peripatos and those too from the Stoa, adopt this division *most expressly*.

πλὴν οὗτοι μὲν ἐλλιπῶς ἀνεστράφθαι δοκοῦσιν, ἐντελέστερον δὲ παρὰ τούτους οἱ εἰπόντες τῆς φιλοσοφίας τὸ μὲν τι εἶναι φυσικὸν τὸ δὲ ἠθικὸν τὸ δὲ λογικόν· ὧν δυνάμει μὲν Πλάτων ἐστὶν ἀρχηγός, περὶ πολλῶν μὲν φυσικῶν πολλῶν δὲ ἠθικῶν οὐκ ὀλίγων δὲ λογικῶν διαλεχθεῖς· ῥητότατα δὲ οἱ περὶ τὸν Ζενοκράτην καὶ οἱ ἀπὸ τοῦ περιπάτου ἔτι δὲ οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς στοᾶς ἔχονται τῆσδε τῆς διαιρέσεως.

IX. XENOCRATES ON THE PRECEPTS OF TRIPTOLEMUS (PORPHYRY, ON ABSTINENCE 4.22.2-5 = HERMIPPUS FGRHIST 1026 F 4 = XENOCRATES F 252 ISNARDI PARENTE)

They say that Triptolemus laid down precepts for the Athenians, and of his precepts the philosopher Xenocrates says that the following three still remain in force at Eleusis: 'Honor thy parents'; 'Offer first-fruits to the gods'; and 'do no harm to animals'. Well, then, the first two he [i.e. Xenocrates] considers to have been handed down excellently: for we ought to do well in return unto our parents to the best of our ability, as they are our benefactors; and we ought to offer first-fruits to the gods, by whom first-fruits were given for our livelihood. But regarding the third precept he raises the question, "what did Triptolemus intend when he enjoined abstinence from eating animals? Did he simply consider," he says, "that it would be a terrible thing to kill one's kindred, or did he rather observe that it happens that they are killed by men because they are the most useful of living things for nourishment? So it would be through wishing to render his life civilized that he tried to preserve those animals which were domesticated and the companions of men. Unless perhaps, assuming that we should honor the gods through an offering of first-fruits, he thought that this prerogative would be better preserved if animal sacrifices were not offered to the gods." Xenocrates gives many other reasons for this precept, none of them very precise, but it is sufficient for our purpose to note that this precept was legislated by Triptolemus.

φασί δὲ καὶ Τριπτόλεμον Ἀθηναίοις νομοθετῆσαι, καὶ τῶν νόμων αὐτοῦ τρεῖς ἔτι Ζενοκράτης ὁ φιλόσοφος λέγει διαμένειν Ἐλευσίνοι τούσδε· γονεῖς τιμᾶν, θεοὺς καρποῖς ἀγάλλειν, ζῶα μὴ σίνεσθαι. τοὺς μὲν οὖν δύο καλῶς παραδοθῆναι· δεῖ γὰρ τοὺς μὲν γονεῖς εὐεργέτας ἡμῶν γεγενημένους ἀντ' εὖ ποιεῖν ἐφ' ὅσον ἐνδέχεται, τοῖς θεοῖς δὲ ἀφ' ὧν ἔδωκαν ἡμῖν εἰς τὸν βίον ἀπαρχὰς ποιεῖσθαι· περὶ δὲ τοῦ τρίτου διαπορεῖ, τί ποτε διανοηθεὶς ὁ Τριπτόλεμος παρήγγειλεν ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ζώων. πότερον γάρ, φησὶν, ὅλως οἰόμενος εἶναι δεινὸν τὸ ὁμογενὲς κτείνειν ἢ συνιδῶν ὅτι συνέβαινε ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὰ χρησιμώτατα τῶν ζώων εἰς τροφήν ἀναιρεῖσθαι; βουλόμενον οὖν ἡμέρον ποιῆσαι τὸν βίον πειραθῆναι καὶ τὰ συνανθρωπεύοντα καὶ μάλιστα τῶν ζώων ἡμερα διασφῆζειν. εἰ μὴ ἄρα διὰ τὸ προστάξει τοῖς καρποῖς τοὺς θεοὺς τιμᾶν ὑπολαβὼν μᾶλλον ἢ διαμεῖναι τὴν τιμὴν ταύτην, εἰ μὴ γίνοντο τοῖς θεοῖς διὰ τῶν ζώων θυσίαι. πολλὰς δὲ αἰτίας τοῦ Ζενοκράτους καὶ ἄλλας οὐ πάνυ ἀκριβεῖς ἀποδιδόντος ἡμῖν αὐταρκες τοσοῦτον ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων, ὅτι τοῦτο νενομοθέτητο ἐκ τοῦ Τριπτόλεμου.

X. NON-ALLEGORICAL EXEGESIS: IAMBlichUS ON XENOCRATES ON PYTHAGORAS (IAMBlichUS, ON THE PYTHAGOREAN LIFE 7 = XENOCRATES F 221 ISNARDI PARENTE; TRANS. AFTER DILLON AND HERSHBELL)

And when she [i.e. Parthenis] gave birth in Sidon of Phoenicia, he [i.e. Mnemarchus] called the son born 'Pythagoras', because the **Pythian greeted** him [by name]. We must reject here the view of Epimenides, Eudoxus, and Xenocrates, who explained that Apollo had intercourse with Parthenis at that time, and when she was not pregnant, he made her so, and announced it through his prophetess.

ἐν δὲ Σιδόνι τῆς Φοινίκης ἀποτεκούσης αὐτῆς τὸν γενόμενον υἱὸν Πυθαγόραν προσηγόρευσεν, ὅτι ἄρα ὑπὸ τοῦ **Πυθίου προηγο**ρεύθη αὐτῶ. παραιτητέοι γὰρ ἐνταῦθα Ἐπιμενίδες καὶ Ἐὔδοξος καὶ Ζενοκράτης, ὑπονοοῦντες τῇ Παρθενίδι τότε μιγῆναι τὸν Ἀπόλλωνα καὶ κύουσαν αὐτὴν ἐκ μὴ οὕτως ἐχούσης καταστήσαί τε καὶ προαγγεῖλαι διὰ τῆς προφήτιδος.

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