

Iamblichus on Pythagoras



Pythagoras' Music of the Spheres

Who “fixed his intellect in the sublime symphonies of the world, he alone hearing and understanding, as it appears, the universal harmony and consonance of the spheres, and the stars that are moved through them, and which produce a fuller and more intense melody than anything effected by mortal sounds.”¹

Pythagoras' Mayavi-Rupa?

“ . . . nearly all historians of his life confidently assert, that in one and the same day he was present at Metapontum in Italy, and Tauromenium in Sicily, and discoursed in common with his disciples in both places, though these cities are separated from each other by many stadia both by land and sea, and cannot be passed through in a great number of days.”²

Pythagoreans on self-control and restraint

“For they so attended to their bodies, that they might always remain in the same condition, and not at one time be lean, but at another, abounding in flesh. For they considered this to be an indication of an anomalous life. In similar manner, also with respect to the mind, they were careful that they might be mildly joyful with uniformity. But they expelled rage, despondence, and perturbation. *And it was a precept with them, that no human casualties ought to be unexpected by those who are endued with intellect, but that they should expect everything may happen which it is not in their power to prevent.* But if at any time they were in a rage, or oppressed with sorrow, or anything else of this kind, they separated themselves from the rest of their associates, and each by himself alone, endeavoured to digest and heal the passion.”³

Pythagoreans trained memory

“In learning too, they did not dismiss what they were taught, till they had firmly comprehended the first rudiments of it; and they recalled to their memory what they had daily heart, after the following manner: A Pythagorean never rose from his bed till he first recollected the transactions of the former day; and he accomplished this by endeavouring to do when he was rising, or what was the second and third thing he said, heard, or commanded to be done. And the same method was adopted with respect to the remainder of the day. For again, he endeavoured to recollect who was the first person that he met, on leaving his house, or who was the second; and with

¹ Taylor T. (*Tr. & Annot.*). *Iamblichus on the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians and Life of Pythagoras*. (Vol. XVII of The Thomas Taylor Series) Sturminster Newton: The Prometheus Trust, 2004; [*Life of Pythagoras* XV, p. 223 & note 4, p. 299]

² *ibid.*, *Life of Pythagoras* XVIII, p. 249

³ *ibid.*, XXXI, p. 270 *et seq.*, citing examples of restraint.

whom he in the first, or second, or third place discoursed. And after the same manner he proceeded in other things. For he endeavoured to resume in his memory all the events of the whole day, and in the very same order in which each of them happened to take place. But if they had sufficient leisure after rising from sleep, they tried after the same manner to recollect the events of the third preceding day. And thus they endeavoured to exercise the memory to a great extent.”¹

Pythagoreans on those who teach for reward

“ . . . it was said by the Pythagoreans, respecting those who teach for the sake of reward, that they show themselves to be worse than statuaries, or those artists who perform their work sitting. For these, when someone orders them to make a statue of Hermes, search for wood adapted to the reception of the proper form; but those pretend that they can readily produce the works of virtue from every nature.² The Pythagoreans likewise said, that it is more necessary to pay attention to philosophy, than to parents and agriculture; for it is owing to the latter, indeed, that we live; but philosophers and preceptors are the causes of our living well, and becoming wise, in consequence of having discovered the right mode of discipline and instruction.”³



On the opinions of others and the education of children, in: *Life of Pythagoras* XXXI, p. 271 *et seq.*

On “what should or should not be done” in everyday life, *ibid.* XVII, p. 230.

¹ *Life of Pythagoras* XXXI, p. 260

² This observation applies also to those of the present day, who, from a profound ignorance of human nature, attempt to enlighten by education the *lowest* class of mankind. For this, as I have elsewhere observed, is an attempt to break the golden chain of beings, to disorganise society, and to render the vulgar dissatisfied with the servile situations in which God and nature intended them to be placed. See the introduction to my translation of *Select Works of Plotinus* — T. Taylor. [p. 166 of TTS Vol. III]

³ *Life of Pythagoras* XXXI, pp. 260 & 286-87; [continues commenting upon Pythagoras’ insistence on secrecy among those he taught.]