

Pythagoras' ban of beans



The rationale for this proscription is explained physiologically, pathologically, politically, sexually, mystically, biochemically, esoterically, and etymologically. Claims that Pythagoras was not a strict vegetarian are refuted and counterbalanced by Apollonius Tyanaeus.

Abstract and train of thoughts

Foreword by the Compiler.

Pythagoras lured, flattered, and controlled animals by the power of his voice, even a bean-eating ox!

For he enjoyed the same dominion over nature as Orpheus, possessor of the phorminx, symbol of the sevenfold mystery of initiation. 6

The Samian Philosopher exhorted his disciples to abstain from beans on account of several different reasons. 7

A group of Pythagorean pilgrims on their way to Metapontum, when attacked by Syracusan soldiers led by Eurymenes, chose death and torture to running through a field of beans. 7

Are these incidents credible?

Pythagoras persuaded an ox to renounce eating beans by merely whispering in the animal's ear, and a she-bear to give up eating human flesh. 9

He also forced a white eagle to descend from the clouds, and subdued him by stroking him gently with the hand, and by talking to him. 9

Pythagorean Apollonius also understood perfectly the language of birds.

Catholics, however, surpassed the wildest romances of Pagan thaumaturgists: they turned a horse, sorcerer; a wolf and a dragon, Christians! 11

The mystery of the banned bean is certainly a very unclean one.

1. A physiological explanation: Fava beans produce flatulence, which is disturbing to those who seek mental calm, particularly before sleep.

Moreover, they may not be conducive to holy living, says Plutarch. 12

2. A pathological explanation: Beans may cause acute haemolytic anaemia in genetically predisposed individuals.

3. A political explanation: The ban of beans was meant to curb the itch for power and profit associated with public office.

Soon after democracy replaced oligarchy in the so-called "Golden Age of Athens," elections to public office were held by drawing a lot from a mixture of white and black fava beans. Those who drew white were thus chosen as magistrates. 13

Plutarch interprets “a fabis abstineto” as an exhortation to people of principle and virtue to keep out of politics, a profession that has always attracted those hankering after power for self-aggrandisement and personal profit. 13

4. An unclean explanation: As beans were slang for testicles, Empedocles perpetuated their prohibition to temper sexual pursuits.

Wretches, utter wretches, keep your hands off beans. 14

This line may be interpreted as “abstain from sexual indulgence.” 14

For those who studied this great pre-Socratic philosopher believe that beans refer to the human testicles and their procreative power, which has been degraded to sexual gratification. 15

5. A mystical explanation: Aristotle believed that the reason for the ban is because beans bind souls to earth.

For the bean stalk, being perforated throughout without any intervening joints, resembles the gates of Hades. 16

6. A biochemical explanation: The high nitrogen contents of beans makes their protein border on the animal kingdom.

Unlike Hydrogen and Oxygen, Nitrogen is of no divine origin but merely an earth-born cement to unite other gases and fluids, and serves as a sponge carrying in itself the breath of life, pure air. 17

A moot point. 17

7. An esoteric explanation: Their magnetism dulls the inner man and stifles the psychic man, says Blavatsky.

8. An etymological explanation: The name of the bean itself gives away the true reason for its notable ban by the Samian Master.

Once again, etymology informs philosophy. 18

Truth is wiser than the wise.

The antipathy that sometimes exists even among kindred substances is clearly demonstrated in the case of the Mexican pomegranate.

Milo of Croton holds the pomegranate or matter tightly in one hand, while extending the other in prayer to the goddess of matter. 19

The difference between the bells of the heathen worshippers, and the bells and pomegranates of the Jewish worship explained. 20

The old Athenians loved beans so much that they even worshipped a Bean-Man. 20

But those initiated to the Eleusinian Mysteries were ordered to abstain from domestic birds, fishes, beans, pomegranates, and apples, says Porphyry. 21

Claims that Pythagoras was not a strict vegetarian are counterbalanced by Apollonius.

Pythagoras used no vegetable more often than beans; he also ate young pigs and goats, alleges Aristoxenus.

Plutarch repeats the same allegation, says Gellius. 22

Counterpoise 1. The story of the fishermen, as retold by Porphyry, suggests that Pythagoras absolutely abstained from fish. 23

Counterpoise 2. Eudoxus maintains that Pythagoras not only abstained from animal flesh, he also kept clear of butchers and hunters. 23

**PYTHAGORAS' BAN OF BEANS
TRAIN OF THOUGHTS**

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| Counterpoise 3. Apollonius of Tyana, more Pythagorean than Pythagoras himself, has always maintained his purity by shunning animal flesh as well as animal clothing. | 23 |
| Pythagoras might have sacrificed cocks and pigs or eat the flesh of sacrificed animals, claims Porphyry. | 24 |
| But when he worked out that the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle was equal to the squares on the sides containing the right angle, Pythagoras sacrificed an ox made of flour, admits the disciple of Plotinus. | 24 |
| Counterpoise 4. Following Pythagoras' example, Apollonius sacrificed a bull made out of frankincense. | 25 |
| More! The Tyanean Theurgist never sacrificed blood and never touched it, not even if it was shed upon an altar. | 26 |
| He berated those who whet their knife against the children of the earth in order to get themselves dress and food. | 26 |
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| In what way is linen better than wool? | 27 |
| Counterpoise 5. Noting that men and beans arose out of putrefaction, Pythagoras forbid the consumption of beans as well as of human flesh. | 27 |
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| . . . and of cocks, pigs, and bulls being unworthy vehicles of divination. | 29 |
| Food for thought. | |
| The ban of beans is far older than Pythagoras, as evidenced by the Orphic Hymn to Earth, where the sacrificer is ordered to fumigate from every kind of seed, except beans and aromatics. | 30 |
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Foreword by the Compiler.

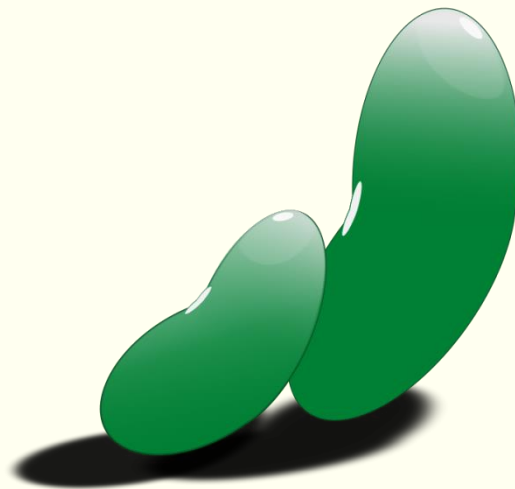
Pythagoras' famous proscription of beans applied to the broad bean (*Vicia faba*) that was the predominant legume of the old world.

The widespread belief amongst Greeks and Romans that *κύριοι* (*κουκιά* in modern Greek) contained the soul of the departed¹ did not prevent them from adopting pulses as their staple food. Romans were obsessed with beans: Cicero was named after the chickpea, *Cicer arietinum*. Other great families of the time, *e.g.*, Fabius, Lentulus, and Piso, drew their names from *Vicia faba*, *Lens culinaris*, and *Pisum sativum*, respectively. Present-day Greeks continue singing the beans' praise but *fava* (*φάβα*) has nothing to do with the *Vicia faba* of the Pythagorean lore, it is the yellow split pea (*Pisum sativum*).

Among generations of Pythagoreans, ancient and modern, there is an on-going divergence of opinion as to their Master's rationale in forbidding beans, as well as to his other perplexing rules and exhortations towards a higher life. The divergence is even more pronounced in the field of metaphysics, adding credence to the adage that the less people know, the more they think they know.

This study is a critical review of the reminiscences of leading philosophers, from the sixth century BCE to the third century CE, in the light of the Ageless Wisdom. We hope that intuitive students will draw their own conclusions.

C. A. B.
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¹ *Faboideæ* is one of three subfamilies of *Fabaceæ* or *Leguminosæ*. They are also known as *Papilionoideæ* from their papilionaceous, or butterfly-like flowers, hence their association with Psyche, the human soul.

Pythagoras lured, flattered, and controlled animals by the power of his voice, even a bean-eating ox!

For he enjoyed the same dominion over nature as Orpheus,¹ possessor of the phorminx, symbol of the sevenfold mystery of initiation.

From Thomas Taylor (*Tr. & Annot.*). *Iamblichus' Life of Pythagoras*, etc. London: J.M. Watkins, 1818.

We may believe in so many ancient and credible historians as have written concerning him, the words of Pythagoras contained something of a recalling and admonitory nature, which extended as far as to irrational animals; by which it may be inferred that learning predominates in those endowed with intellect, since it tames even wild beasts, and those which are considered to be deprived of reason. For it is said that Pythagoras detained the Daunian² bear which had most severely injured the inhabitants, and that having gently stroked it with his hand for a long time, fed it with maize and acorns, and compelled it by an oath no longer to touch any living thing, he dismissed it. But the bear immediately after hid herself in the mountains and woods, and was never seen from that time to attack any irrational animal. Perceiving likewise an ox at Tarentum feeding in a pasture, and eating among other things green-beans, he advised the herdsman to tell the ox to abstain from the beans. The herdsman, however, laughed at him, and said that he did not understand the language of oxen, but if Pythagoras did, it was in vain to advise him to speak to the ox, but fit that he himself should advise the animal to abstain from such food. Pythagoras therefore, approaching to the ear of the ox, and whispering in it for a long time, not only caused him then to refrain from beans, but it is said that he never after tasted them. This ox also lived for a long time at Tarentum near the temple of Juno, where it remained when it was old, and was called the sacred ox of Pythagoras. It was also fed by those that came to it with human food. When likewise he happened to be conversing with his familiars about birds, symbols, and prodigies, and was observing that all these are the messengers of the Gods, sent by them to those men who are truly dear to the Gods, he is said to have brought down an eagle that was flying over Olympia, and after gently stroking, to have dismissed it. Through these things, therefore, and other things similar to these, he demonstrated that he pos-

¹ [See "Orpheus' Hymn to the Muses," "Orpheus' legend and works" and "Orpheus' Hymn to Apollo," in our Hellenic and Hellenistic Papers Series. — ED. PHIL.]

² [Daunia is a region in Apulia, southern Italy. In ancient times, together with Peucetia and Messapia it formed the Iapygia.]

sessed the same dominion as Orpheus, over savage animals, and that he allured and detained them by the power of voice proceeding from the mouth.¹

The Samian Philosopher exhorted his disciples to abstain from beans on account of several different reasons.

He likewise exhorted [his disciples] to abstain from beans, on account of many sacred and physical causes, and also such causes as pertain to the soul. And he established as laws other precepts similar to these, beginning through nutriment to lead men to virtue.²

A group of Pythagorean pilgrims on their way to Metapontum,³ when attacked by Syracusan soldiers led by Eurymenes,⁴ chose death and torture to running through a field of beans.

The Pythagoreans being disturbed and terrified at an attack so unexpected, and at the superior number of their enemies (for the whole number of the Pythagoreans was but ten), and considering also that they must be taken captive, as they were without arms, and had to contend with men, who were variously armed — they found that their only safety was in flight, and they did not conceive that this was foreign to virtue. For they knew that fortitude, according to the decision of right reason, is the science of things which are to be avoided and endured. And this they now obtained. For those who were with Eurymenes, being heavy armed, would have abandoned the pursuit of the Pythagoreans, if the latter in their flight had not arrived at a certain field sown with beans, and which were in a sufficiently flourishing condition. Not being willing therefore to violate the dogma which ordered them not to touch beans, they stood still, and from necessity attacked their pursuers with stones and sticks, and whatever else they happened to meet with, till they had slain some, and wounded many of them. All the Pythagoreans however, were at length slain by the spearmen, nor would any one of them suffer himself to be taken captive, but preferred death to this, conformably to the mandates of their sect.

Eurymenes therefore, and his soldiers, were beyond measure disturbed on finding that they should not be able to bring one of the Pythagoreans alive to Dionysius, though they were sent by him for this purpose alone. Hence, having piled earth on the slain, and buried them in that place in a common sepulchre, they turned their steps homeward. As they were returning, however, they happened to meet with Myllias the Crotonian, and his wife Timycha the Lacedæmonian, whom the other Pythagoreans had left behind, because Timycha being pregnant, was now in her sixth⁵ month, and on this account walked leisurely. These therefore, the soldiers gladly made captive, and led them to the tyrant [Dionysius I], paying every attention to

¹ *Iamblichus' Life of Pythagoras*, Ch. XIII, pp. 29-30; (tr. Taylor)

² *ibid.*, Ch. XXIV, p. 59; (tr. Taylor)

³ [An Achæan colony of Magna Græcia on the gulf of Tarentum.]

⁴ Because they had rejected the friendship of the Dionysius I the Elder, 432–367 BCE, tyrant of Syracuse.

⁵ In the original δεκατον *the tenth month*; but as it very seldom happens that a woman is in a state of pregnancy more than nine months, it appears to me that for δεκατον we should read εκτον *the sixth month*, as in the above translation.

them, in order that they might be brought to him safe. But the tyrant having learnt what had happened, was greatly dejected, and said to the two Pythagoreans,

You shall obtain from me honours transcending all others in dignity, if you will consent to reign in conjunction with me.

All his offers however being rejected by Myllias and Timycha. If then, said [the tyrant],

. . . you will only teach me one thing, I will dismiss you with a sufficiently safe guard.

Myllias therefore asking him what it was he wished to learn; Dionysius replied,

It is this, why your companions chose rather to die, than to tread on beans?

But Myllias immediately answered,

My companions indeed submitted to death, in order that they might not tread upon beans, but I would rather tread on them, than tell you the cause of this.

Dionysius therefore, being astonished at this answer, ordered him to be forcibly taken away, but commanded Timycha to be tortured: for he thought, that as she was a woman, pregnant, and deprived of her husband, she would easily tell him what he wanted to know, through fear of the torments. The heroic woman, however, grinding her tongue with her teeth, bit it off, and spit it at the tyrant, evincing by this, that though her sex being vanquished by the torments might be compelled to disclose something which ought to be concealed in silence, yet the member subservient to the development of it, should be entirely cut off. So much difficulty did they make in admitting foreign friendships, even though they should happen to be royal.¹

Such as the admirable deeds of Timycha, and of those Pythagoreans who chose to die rather than transgress the decisions of Pythagoras concerning beans, and other things conformable to suchlike pursuits. Such also are the deeds which Pythagoras himself generously accomplished, when he travelled everywhere alone, and underwent immense labours and dangers, choosing to leave his country and dwell among strangers. Likewise, when he dissolved tyrannies, gave an orderly arrangement to confused polities, and emancipated cities.²



¹ *Iamblichus' Life of Pythagoras*, Ch. XXXI pp. 100-2; (tr. Taylor)

² *ibid.*, Ch. XXXII p. 110

Are these incidents credible?

Pythagoras persuaded an ox to renounce eating beans by merely whispering in the animal's ear, and a she-bear to give up eating human flesh.

He also forced a white eagle to descend from the clouds, and subdued him by stroking him gently with the hand, and by talking to him.

Scholastic sceptics, as well as ignorant materialists, have greatly amused themselves for the last two centuries over the *absurdities* attributed to Pythagoras by his biographer, Iamblichus. The Samian philosopher is said to have persuaded a she-bear to give up eating human flesh; to have forced a white eagle to descend to him from the clouds, and to have subdued him by stroking him gently with the hand, and by talking to him. On another occasion, Pythagoras actually persuaded an ox to renounce eating beans, by merely whispering in the animal's ear!¹ Oh, ignorance and superstition of our forefathers, how ridiculous they appear in the eyes of our enlightened generations! Let us, however, analyse this absurdity. Every day we see unlettered men, proprietors of strolling menageries, taming and completely subduing the most ferocious animals, merely by the power of their irresistible will. Nay, we have at the present moment in Europe several young and physically-weak girls, under twenty years of age, fearlessly doing the same thing. Everyone has either witnessed or heard of the seemingly magical power of some mesmerizers and psychologists. They are able to subjugate their patients for any length of time. Regazzoni, the mesmerist who excited such wonder in France and London, has achieved far more extraordinary feats than what is above attributed to Pythagoras. Why, then, accuse the ancient biographers of such men as Pythagoras and Apollonius of Tyana of either wilful misrepresentation or absurd superstition? When we realize that the majority of those who are so sceptical as to the magical powers possessed by the ancient philosophers, who laugh at the old theogonies and the fallacies of mythology, nevertheless have an implicit faith in the records and inspiration of their Bible, hardly daring to doubt even that monstrous absurdity that Joshua arrested the course of the sun, we may well say *Amen* to Godfrey Higgins' just rebuke:

When I find learned men believing *Genesis literally*, which the ancients, with all their failings, had too much sense to receive except allegorically, I am tempted to doubt the reality of the improvement of the human mind.²

One of the very few commentators on old Greek and Latin authors, who have given their just dues to the ancients for their mental development, is Thomas Taylor. In his translation of Iamblichus' *Life of Pythagoras*, we find him remarking as follows:

Since Pythagoras, as Iamblichus informs us . . . was initiated in all the Mysteries of Byblus and Tyre, in the sacred operations of the Syrians, and in the Mysteries of the Phœnicians, and also . . . that he spent two and twenty years in the adyta of temples in Egypt, associated with the Magi in Babylon, and was in-

¹ *Iamblichus' Life of Pythagoras*, pp. 29-30; (tr. Taylor)

² *Anacalypsis*, Vol. I, p. 807

structed by them in their venerable knowledge; — it is not at all wonderful that he was skilled in magic, or theurgy, and was therefore able to perform things which surpass *merely human power*, and which appear to be perfectly incredible to the vulgar.¹

Pythagorean Apollonius also understood perfectly the language of birds.

His other discourses [Apollonius] delivered under the trees which grow hard by the cloisters; and in these he dealt with the question of communism, and taught that they ought to support and be supported by one another. While he was doing so on one occasion, sparrows were sitting quite silent upon the trees, but one of them suddenly set to chirping as it flew up, just as if he had some exhortations to give to his fellows; and the latter, on hearing it, themselves set up a chirping and rose and flew up under the guidance of the one.

Now Apollonius went on with his argument, for he knew what it was that made the sparrows take wing, but he did not explain the matter to the multitude who were listening to him; but when they all looked at the birds and some of them in their silliness thought it a miraculous occurrence, Apollonius interrupted his argument and said:

A boy has slipped who was carrying some barley in a bowl, and after carelessly gathering together what was fallen, he has gone off, leaving much of it scattered about it in yonder alley, and this sparrow, witnessing the occurrence has come here to acquaint his fellows with the good luck, and to invite them to come and eat it with him.

Most of his audience accordingly ran off to the spot, but Apollonius continued to those who remained with him the discourse he had proposed to himself on the topic of communism; and when they returned talking loudly and full of wonder, he continued thus:

You see how the sparrows care for one another and delight in communism, but we are far from approving of it, nay, should we happen to see anyone sharing his own in common with others, we set him down as a spendthrift and talk about his extravagance and so forth, while as for those who are supported by him, we call them parasites and flatterers. What then is left for us to do, except to shut ourselves up like birds that are being fed up and fattened, and gorge ourselves in the dark until we literally burst with fat?²

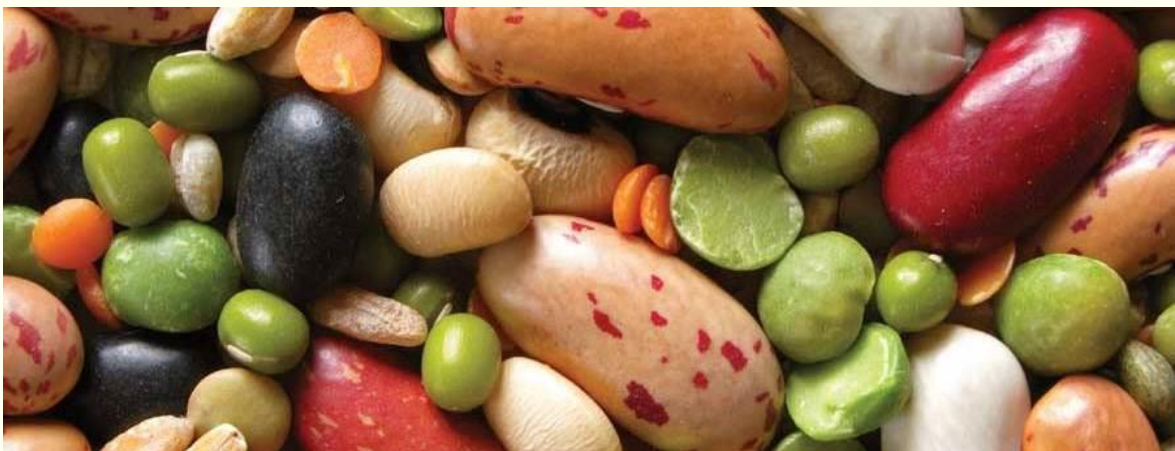
¹ *Isis Unveiled*, I pp. 283-84; [& quoting annotation by Thos. Taylor in *Iamblichus' Life of Pythagoras*, p. 212]

² Philostratus, *Apollonius of Tyana*, Vol. I, Bk. IV, § 3, pp. 351-53; (tr. Conybeare)

Catholics, however, surpassed the wildest romances of Pagan thaumaturgists: they turned a horse, sorcerer; a wolf and a dragon, Christians!

And what are we to think of that other narrative, to disbelieve in which is “to risk one’s salvation,” as we were informed by a Pope’s missionary, of the Order of the Franciscans? When St. Francis preached a sermon in the wilderness, the birds assembled from the four cardinal points of the world. They warbled and applauded every sentence; they sang a holy mass in chorus; finally they dispersed to carry the glad tidings all over the universe. A grasshopper, profiting by the absence of the Holy Virgin, who generally kept company with the saint, remained perched on the head of the “blessed one” for a whole week. Attacked by a ferocious wolf, the saint, who had no other weapon but the sign of the cross which he made upon himself, instead of running away from his rabid assailant, began arguing with the beast. Having imparted to him the benefit to be derived from the holy religion, St. Francis never ceased talking until the wolf became as meek as a lamb, and even shed tears of repentance over his past sins. Finally, he “stretched his paws in the hands of the saint, followed him like a dog through all the towns in which he preached, and became half a Christian”¹ Wonders of zoology! a horse turned sorcerer, a wolf and a dragon turned Christians!²

These two anecdotes, chosen at random from among hundreds, if rivalled are not surpassed by the wildest romances of the Pagan thaumaturgists, magicians, and spiritualists! And yet, when Pythagoras is said to have subdued animals, even wild beasts, merely through a powerful mesmeric influence, he is pronounced by one-half of the Catholics a bare-faced impostor, and by the rest a sorcerer, who worked magic in confederacy with the Devil! Neither the she-bear, nor the eagle, nor yet the bull that Pythagoras is said to have persuaded to give up eating beans, were alleged to have answered with human voices; while St. Benedict’s “black raven,” whom he called “brother,” argues with him, and croaks his answers like a born casuist. When the saint offers him one-half of a poisoned loaf, the raven grows indignant and reproaches him in Latin as though he had just graduated at the Propaganda!³



¹ See *The Golden Legend; Life of St. Francis: and Demonologia*, pp. 398, 428

² [Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 76-77]

³ *Isis Unveiled*, II pp. 77-78

The mystery of the banned bean is certainly a very unclean one.

1. A physiological explanation:

Fava beans produce flatulence, which is disturbing to those who seek mental calm, particularly before sleep.

The nature of the information which Aristoxenus¹ has handed down about Pythagoras [was] on the ground that it was more authoritative; and also what Plutarch wrote [was] in the same vein about that same Pythagoras.

An erroneous belief of long standing has established itself and become current, that the philosopher Pythagoras did not eat of animals: also that he abstained from the bean, which the Greeks call *κίναμος*. In accordance with that belief the poet Callimachus wrote:²

I tell you too, as did Pythagoras,
Withhold your hands from beans, a hurtful food.

Also, as the result of the same belief, Marcus Cicero wrote these words in the first book of his work *On Divination*:³

Plato therefore bids us go to our sleep in such bodily condition that there may be nothing to cause delusion and disturbance in our minds. It is thought to be for that reason too that the Pythagoreans were forbidden to eat beans, a food that produces great flatulency, which is disturbing to those who seek mental calm.⁴

Moreover, they may not be conducive to holy living, says Plutarch.

Why is it the customary rule that those who are practising holy living must abstain from legumes?

- 1 Did they, like the followers of Pythagoras, religiously abstain from beans for the reasons which are commonly offered, and from vetch and chickpea, because their names (lathyros and erebinthos) suggest Lethē and Erebus?

¹ [Aristoxenus of Tarentum, Greek Peripatetic philosopher and pupil of Aristotle.]

² Fr. 128, Schn.

³ § 62; see Pease, *ad loc.*

[Cf. alternative translation by C.D. Yonge: "Plato then asserts that we should bring our bodies into such a disposition before we go to sleep as to leave nothing which may occasion error or perturbation in our dreams. For this reason, perhaps, Pythagoras laid it down as a rule, that his disciples should not eat beans, because this food is very flatulent, and contrary to that tranquillity of mind which a truth-seeking spirit should possess."]

⁴ Aulus Cornelius Gellius, *Noctes Atticæ* (Attic Nights); tr. J.C. Rolfe. First published in 1927 in three volumes as part of the Loeb Classical Library; Loeb Vol. I, Bk. IV, 11.

- 2 Or is it because they make particular use of legumes for funeral feasts and invocations of the dead?
- 3 Or is it rather because one must keep the body clean and light for purposes of holy living and lustration? Now legumes are a flatulent food and produce surplus matter that requires much purgation.
- 4 Or is it because the windy and flatulent quality of the food stimulates desire?¹



2. A pathological explanation: Beans may cause acute haemolytic anaemia in genetically predisposed individuals.

Ingestion of broad beans by people deficient in glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase, mainly young children, may induce “favism,” acute hæmolytic anæmia. This modern hypothesis, improbable though it is, is gaining favour among historical determinists and medical materialists.

Critical appraisal of favism as a possible explanation of the Pythagorean prohibition is outside the scope of this study. Interested readers may wish to consult Professor Frederick J. Simoons’ *Plants of Life, Plants of Death*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1998 (Ch. 8, pp. 216-49). It is a solid piece of scholarship and a lucid review of the subject matter.



3. A political explanation: The ban of beans was meant to curb the itch for power and profit associated with public office.

Soon after democracy replaced oligarchy in the so-called “Golden Age of Athens,” elections to public office were held by drawing a lot from a mixture of white and black fava beans. Those who drew white were thus chosen as magistrates.²

Plutarch interprets “a fabis abstineto” as an exhortation to people of principle and virtue to keep out of politics, a profession that has always attracted those hankering after power for self-aggrandisement and personal profit.

Abstain from beans, was an admonition of Pythagoras to his followers; meaning by that to exhort them not to interfere in the election of magistrates, in which, it should seem, there was the same heat and contention, the same violence and confusion as too often occur among us, when persons are elected to places of honour, or profit.

¹ Plutarch, *Roman Questions*, 95; (tr. Babbitt)

² Or, alternatively, removed from office: a form of recall, ἀποχειροτομία; cf. Aristotle, *Constitution of Athens*, ch. 61. Cf. Plutarch, *De liberis educandis*, lib. 17; (tr. Babbitt, fn. 4)

The electors among the Athenians were used to poll, or give their suffrages, by putting beans, instead of white or black stones as on other occasions, into a vase placed for the purpose.¹



4. An unclean explanation: As beans were slang for testicles, Empedocles perpetuated their prohibition to temper sexual pursuits.

Furthermore, the reason for the mistaken idea about abstaining from beans seems to be, that in a poem of Empedocles, who was a follower of Pythagoras, this line is found:²

Wretches, utter wretches, keep your hands off beans.³

For most men thought that *κυάμους* meant the vegetable, according to the common use of the word. But those who have studied the poems of Empedocles with greater care and knowledge say that here *κυάμους* refers to the testicles, and that after the Pythagorean manner they were called in a covert and symbolic way *κύαμοι*, because they are the cause of pregnancy and furnish the power for human generation:⁴ and that therefore Empedocles in that verse desired to keep men, not from eating beans, but from excess in venery [the pursuit of sexual gratification].⁵

This line may be interpreted as “abstain from sexual indulgence.”

Apollonius of Tyana was a man wholly devoted to Pythagorism, and we know that when he was in Æolis he sacrificed to Palamedes as to a God, and afterwards there appeared to him in a vision the gigantic form of Achilles, eighteen feet high, by whom he was ordered to set up an idol of Palamedes,⁶ which he would find buried at Methymnus. So that, in the mystic phraseology of Apollonius, the reviving of Pythagorism was the setting up of Palamedes. Now Pythagoras, although a preacher of ascetic forbearance, was so far from imitating his master in the reaping of beans, that he expresses the liveliest horror of destroying the fountains of paternity:

*Δειλοι, πανδειλοι, κυαμων απο χειρας εχεσθε.*⁷
*Ισον τοι κυαμους τε φαγειν, κεφαλας τε τοκηων.*⁸

¹ Adagia of Erasmus, “A Fabis abstineto”; (tr. Bland)

² Fr. 141, Diehls

³ [tr. by ED. PHIL.]

⁴ Associating *κύαμος* with *κυεῖν* “to conceive.”

⁵ A.C. Gellius, *Noctes Atticæ* (Attic Nights); tr. J.C. Rolfe. First published in 1927 in three volumes as part of the Loeb Classical Library; Loeb Vol. I, Bk. IV, 11.

⁶ Philostratus, Bk. iv, c. 4-5

⁷ [Empedocles: *Purifications*, fr. 141]

⁸ [“The Pythagorean prohibition of beans ran *ἴσον τοι κυάμους τε φαγεῖν κεφαλὰς τε τοκήων*. The thought is: Pythagoras regarded the eating of beans as an abomination equal to that of eating the heads of one’s parents; but men of old included all heads in the taboo, since they did not eat pigs’ brains.” *The Deipnosophistæ of Athenæus*, Vol. I of the Loeb Classical Library, ed. 1927; Bk. II, 65F, *fn.* 67]

For those who studied this great pre-Socratic philosopher believe that beans refer to the human testicles and their procreative power, which has been degraded to sexual gratification.

Upon this prohibition the grammarian Aulus Gellius¹ [says]:

Sed qui diligentius scitiusque carmina Empedocli arbitrati sunt, *κυαμους* hoc in loco testiculos significare dicunt, eosque more Pythagoræ opertè atque symbolicè *κυαμους* appellatos, quod sint *εις το κυειν δεινοι και αιπιοι του κυειν*, et genituræ humanæ vim præbeant; idcircoque Empedoclen versu isto non a fabulo edendo, sed a rei venereæ proluvio voluisse homines deducere.²

All of which is very well said, except the concluding inference, of which the futility is evident. The same critic labours to show that his metaphor was confined to words, and not extended into practice by an abstinence from the use of beans, which on the contrary he esteemed a salutary food: but I am far from believing that he was so poor a mystic as not to observe the outward sign of his doctrine, or so bad a doctor as to think beans wholesome. It may be wondered that the Palamedeans, who removed from their own persons the antitypes of the bean, should occur in Roman fable as Fabii, and not rather as Nefabi or Acyami; but we should remember that when they removed they did not cast away, but retained *εν απορρητω* with signal veneration, and such were the notable oblations of Atys³ to the Cyzicense Cybele, and of Comabus to the Dea Syria Semiramis. The Bacchic title, or that of Sabus, was affected by all the sects of the Noachid league which opposed the Cushim, but those orgies of Bacchus and of Cybele to which Homer alludeth not, and which the Roman severity would not tolerate for a moment, were in my notion Palamedean, and he probably gave rise to the worship of Bacchus the Cyamite,⁴ *ο Κυαμητης*.

The mystery of the ban, certainly a very unclean one, was exceedingly familiar to the Romans in their earliest customs.⁵

For further insights to the She-Wolf who reared Romulus and Remus, the legend of the Quintilians and the Fabians, respective factions of the twin brothers, and the fact that Acca Larentia (identified with Dea Dia, goddess of growth), bore the appellation of *Fabula*, the She-Bean,⁶ *Φαβολαν επικλησιν εινα λεγουσιν*, look up *ibid.*, pp. 58-60.



¹ Bk. iv, c. xl. Virgines nubiles et jain viro idoneæ ab Aristophane *κυαμιζειν* decebantur. Julius Pollux, *Onom.*, Bk. 2, c. 2, s. 18.

² [i.e., “for most men thought that *κυάμους* meant the vegetable, according to the common use of the word. But those who have studied the poems of Empedocles with greater care and knowledge say that here *κυάμους* refers to the testicles, and that after the Pythagorean manner they were called in a covert and symbolic way *κύαμοι*, because they are the cause of pregnancy and furnish the power for human generation: and that therefore Empedocles in that verse desired to keep men, not from eating beans, but from excess in venery <the pursuit of sexual gratification>.” tr. Rolfe, v. i]

³ *Schol. Nicand. Alex.* v. 8; [or Attis, the Phrygian god of vegetation and consort of Cybele. Galli, his priests, were eunuchs]

⁴ Hesychius

⁵ A. Herbert, *Nimrod: a Discourse on Certain Passages of History and Fable*, London 1828; Vol. III, pp. 57-58.

⁶ Plutarch, *Qu. Rom.*, p. 272; Xylander

5. A mystical explanation: Aristotle believed that the reason for the ban is because beans bind souls to earth.

[Pythagoras] likewise exhorted them to abstain from beans.

In the *Protreptics* this is the 37th Symbol; and Iamblichus has not developed for us the more mystical signification of this symbol. For he only says that

. . . it admonishes us to beware of everything which is corruptive of our converse with the Gods and divine prophecy.

For the bean stalk, being perforated throughout without any intervening joints, resembles the gates of Hades.

But Aristotle appears to have assigned the true mystical reason why the Pythagoreans abstained from beans. For he says (apud *Lært.*) that

Pythagoras considered beans as a symbol of generation [*i.e.*, of the whole of a visible and corporeal nature], which subsists according to a right line, and is without inflection;¹ because a bean alone of almost all spermatoc plants, is perforated through the whole of it, and is not obstructed by any intervening joints.

Hence he adds,

It resembles the gates of Hades.

For these are perpetually open without any impediment to souls descending into generation. The exhortation, therefore, to abstain from beans, is equivalent to admonishing us to beware of a continued and perpetual descent into the realms of generation. Hence the true meaning of the following celebrated lines in Virgil:

. facilis descensus Averno.
Noctes atque dies patet atri janua Ditis:
Sed revocare gradum, superasque evadere ad auras,
Hoc opus, hic labor est.

i.e.,

The gates of Hell are open night and day,
Smooth the descent, and easy is the way;
But to return, and view the cheerful skies,
In this, the mighty task and labour lies.

— DRYDEN²



¹ [*i.e.*, a straight line, without any curve.]

² *Iamblichus' Life of Pythagoras*, pp. 211-12; [annotation by Thos. Taylor on Iamblichus' statement, p. 59]

6. A biochemical explanation: The high nitrogen contents of beans makes their protein border on the animal kingdom.

The symbiotic relationship of bean roots with Rhizobia, nitrogen-fixing bacteria, converts inert atmospheric nitrogen to organic nitrogen, the building block of both plant and animal protein, and store it in the seed. Highly nutritious beans may be, but their high nitrogen content drags the soul down to earth.

Unlike Hydrogen and Oxygen, Nitrogen is of no divine origin but merely an earth-born cement to unite other gases and fluids, and serves as a sponge carrying in itself the breath of life, pure air.

For what are the manifested “Mother,” the “Father-Son-Husband” (Aditi and Daksha, a form of Brahmā, as Creators) and the “Son” — the three “First-born” — *but simply Hydrogen, Oxygen,* and that which in its terrestrial manifestation is called *Nitrogen*. Even the exoteric descriptions of the “First Born” triad give all the characteristics of these three *gases*.¹

Occult Science teaches that “Mother” lies stretched in infinity (during *Pralaya*) as the great Deep, the “*dry Waters of Space,*” according to the quaint expression in the *Catechism*, and becomes *wet* only after the separation and the moving over its face of *Nārāyana*, the “Spirit which is invisible Flame, which never burns, but sets on fire all that it touches, and gives it life and generation.”² And now Science tells us that “the first-born elements . . . most nearly allied to protyle” . . . would be “*hydrogen . . .* which for some time would be the only existing form of matter” in the Universe.

What says *Old Science*? It answers: Just so; but we would call hydrogen and oxygen (which instils the fire of life into the “Mother” by incubation) in the *pregenetic* and even pre-geological ages — the *Spirit*, the *noumenon* of that which becomes in its grossest form oxygen and hydrogen and nitrogen on Earth — nitrogen being of no divine origin, but merely an earth-born cement to unite other gases and fluids, and serve as a sponge to carry in itself the breath of LIFE — pure air.³ Before these *gases* and fluids become what they are in *our* atmosphere, they are interstellar Ether; still earlier and on a *deeper* plane — something else, and so on *in infinitum*.⁴

A moot point.

Apart from meat, fish, and dairy products, most non-leguminous seeds and green leaf vegetables are also nitrogen-rich.



¹ *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 623

² “The Lord is a consuming *fire*” [*Deut. iv, 24*]. “In him was *life*, and the life was the light of men.” [*John i, 4*]

³ Which if separated ALCHEMICALLY would yield the Spirit of Life, and its Elixir.

⁴ *Secret Doctrine*, I pp. 625-26

7. An esoteric explanation: Their magnetism dulls the inner man and stifles the psychic man, says Blavatsky.

There is also a vast difference between the psychic effect of nitrogenized food, such as flesh, and non-nitrogenous food, such as fruits and green vegetables. Certain meats, like beef, and vegetables, like beans, have always been interdicted to students of occultism, not because either of them were more or less holy than others, but because while perhaps highly nutritious and supporting to the body, their magnetism was deadening and obstructive to the “psychic man.”¹



8. An etymological explanation: The name of the bean itself gives away the true reason for its notable ban by the Samian Master.

Once again, etymology informs philosophy.²

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Κύαμος (Kyamos) | Vicia fava; lot by which public officers were elected; swelling of the paps at puberty. |
| Κύανος (Kyanos) | Dark blue; lapis lazuli. |
| Κυβέλη (Kyvelē) | Cybele, the many-breasted goddess, personification of the vital essence. |
| Κύβος (Kyvōs) | Cube, symbol of manifested Nature. |
| Κυέω (Kyeō) | Bear in the womb. |
| Κύημα (Kyēma) | That which is conceived; swollen as a result of growth |
| Κυκάω (Kykaō) | Stir, of curdling milk; throw into confusion or disorder. |
| Κύκλος (Kyklos) | Cycle-circle, symbol of the subjective world and first geometrical figure, the most refined form of matter. |
| Κύων (Kyōn) | Dog of Cybele or Pan, Nature presiding over physical generation. |



¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE RATIONALE OF FASTS) IV pp. 296-97; [full text in our Blavatsky Speaks Series. — ED. PHIL.]

² Cf. Liddell & Scott

Truth is wiser than the wise.

The antipathy that sometimes exists even among kindred substances is clearly demonstrated in the case of the Mexican pomegranate.

As examples of antipathies or sympathies among plants, [Athanasius Kircher] instances the aversion which the vine feels for the cabbage, and its fondness toward the olive-tree; the love of the ranunculus for the water-lily, and of the rue for the fig. The antipathy which sometimes exists even among kindred substances is clearly demonstrated in the case of the Mexican pomegranate,¹ whose shoots, when cut to pieces, repel each other with the “most extraordinary ferocity.”²

Milo of Croton holds the pomegranate or matter tightly in one hand, while extending the other in prayer to the goddess of matter.

And he also gave them an account of the brazen statue of Milo³ and explained the attitude of this figure. For this Milo is seen standing on a disk with his two feet close together, and in his left hand he grasps a pomegranate, while with his right hand the fingers are extended and pressed together as if to pass through a chink.

Now among the people of Olympia and Arcadia the story told about this athlete is, that he was so inflexible that he could never be induced to leave the spot on which he stood; and they infer the grip of the clenched fingers from the way he grasps the pomegranate, and that they could never be separated from another, however much you struggled with any one of them, because the intervals between the extended fingers are very close; and they say that the fillet with which his head is bound is a symbol of temperance and sobriety.

¹ Cf. “Rimmon (*Heb.*). A Pomegranate, the type of abundant fertility; occurs in the Old Testament; it figures in Syrian temples and was deified there, as an emblem of the celestial prolific mother of all; also a type of the full womb.” *Theosophical Glossary*

Proserpina, tricked by Hades to eat a pomegranate seed, was doomed to remain in the Underworld to dispose of the souls of the dead. Cf. “Proserpina, or Persephone, stands here for post mortem Karma, which is said to regulate the separation of the lower from the higher ‘principles’: the *Soul*, as *Nephesh*, the breath of animal life, which remains for a time in Kama-loka, from the higher compound *Ego*, which goes into the state of Devachan, or bliss.” *Key to Theosophy*, § VI (THE GREEK TEACHINGS) p. 99 *fn.*

[Pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) is one of three ingredients of *chiles en nogada*, its red seeds topping the national Mexican dish and gleaming like rubies. Its status is reflected in the red band of the Mexican flag; two more ingredients of this popular dish complete the tricolour flag: stuffed green chilies covered by a creamy walnut sauce. — ED. PHIL.]

² *Isis Unveiled*, I p. 209

³ Pythagoras’ son-in-law and famous athlete.

Apollonius while admitting that this account was wisely conceived, said that the truth was still wiser.

In order that you may know the meaning of the statue of Milo, the people of Croton made this athlete a priest of Hera. As to the meaning then of this mitre,¹ I need not explain it further than by reminding you that the hero was a priest. But the pomegranate is the only fruit which is grown in honour of Hera; and the disk beneath his feet means that the priest is standing on a small shield to offer his prayer to Hera; and this is also indicated by his right hand. As for the artist's rendering the fingers and feet, between which he has left no interval, that you may ascribe to the antique style of the sculpture.²

The difference between the bells of the heathen worshippers, and the bells and pomegranates of the Jewish worship explained.³

The difference is this: the former, besides purifying the soul of man with their harmonious tones, kept *evil* demons at a distance,

for the sound of pure bronze breaks the enchantment,

says Tibullus,⁴ and the latter explained it by saying that the sound of the bells,

shall be heard [by the Lord] when he [the priest] goeth in unto the holy place before the Lord, and when he goeth out, *that he die not*.⁵

Thus, one sound served to keep away *evil* spirits, and the other, the Spirit of Jehovah. The Scandinavian traditions affirm that the Trolls were always driven from their abodes by the bells of the churches. A similar tradition is in existence in relation to the fairies of Great Britain.⁶

The old Athenians loved beans so much that they even worshipped a Bean-Man.

Pausanias, 2nd century Greek traveller and geographer, mentions *Κυαμιτης* (Cya-mites), the Bean-Man,⁷ an Athenian hero worshipped in a temple "as we go to Eleusis by the Sacred Way":⁸

¹ [Cf. "The head-dress of a religious dignitary, as of a Roman Catholic Bishop: a cap ending upwards in two lips, like a fish's head with open mouth — *os tincæ* — associated with Dagon, the Babylonian deity, the word *dag* meaning fish. Curiously enough the *os uteri* has been so called in the human female and the fish is related to the goddess Aphrodite who sprang from the sea. It is curious also that the ancient Chaldee legends speak of a religious teacher coming to them springing out of the sea, named Oannēs and Annedotus, half fish, half man." *Theosophical Glossary*: Mitre. Students to consult "The Number of the Beast is the Number of Man," in our Planteray Rounds and Globes Series. — ED. PHIL.]

² Philostratus, *Apollonius of Tyana*, Vol. I, Bk. IV, § 28, p. 413; (tr. Conybeare)

³ [Cf. "And they made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates upon the hem of the robe, round about between the pomegranates. A bell and a pomegranate, a bell and a pomegranate, round about the hem of the robe to minister in; as the Lord commanded Moses." *Exodus xxxix*, 26-26.]

⁴ *Elegies* I, viii, 22

⁵ *Exodus xxviii*, 35; *Ecclesiasticus xlv*, 9

⁶ Cf. *Isis Unveiled*, II p. 624 *fn.*

⁷ Cf. *Photii Patriarchæ Lexicon* (ed. Brill, 1864), Vol. I, p. 354; [ἡρωὸς ἦν ὀνόματι κυρίου; ἰσὼς δὲ ἐξ ἐπωνυμίας τῶν κυαμῶν, διότι παρ' αὐτῶ ἐκπληροῦντο οἱ κυαμενοὶ ἀρχόντες ἢ οἱ οὐ κυαμὸς ἐπιπρασκεῖτο παρ' αὐτῶ.] *Codex κυαμιταί ἀρχόντες*; corr. Lobeck. *Brevius, Lex rhet.* Bekk. p. 274.14. Cf. *Hist.* IV, 2044b.

⁸ Plutarch's *Morals*, "Lives of the Ten Orators," 4 (on Isocrates); tr. Goodwin

After we have crossed the Cephisus we come to an ancient altar of Gracious Zeus. . . . Beside the road is built a small temple called the temple of Cyamites. I cannot say with certainty whether he was the first who sowed beans (cyamoi), or whether they made up the name of a bean-hero because the discovery of beans cannot be attributed to Demeter. Anyone who has seen the mysteries at Eleusis, or has read what are called the works of Orpheus, knows what I mean.¹

But those initiated to the Eleusinian Mysteries were ordered to abstain from domestic birds, fishes, beans, pomegranates, and apples, says Porphyry.

In the Eleusinian mysteries, likewise, the initiated are ordered to abstain from domestic birds, from fishes and beans, pomegranates and apples; which fruits are as equally defiling to the touch, as a woman recently delivered, and a dead body. But whoever is acquainted with the nature of divinely-luminous appearances knows also on what account it is requisite to abstain from all birds, and especially for him who hastens to be liberated from terrestrial concerns, and to be established with the celestial Gods. Vice, however, as we have frequently said, is sufficiently able to patronize itself, and especially when it pleads its cause among the ignorant. Hence, among those that are moderately vicious, some think that a dehortation² of this kind is vain babbling, and, according to the proverb, the nugacity³ of old women; and others are of opinion that it is superstition. But those who have made greater advances in improbity, are prepared, not only to blaspheme those who exhort to, and demonstrate the propriety of this abstinence, but calumniate purity itself as enchantment and pride. They, however, suffering the punishment of their sins, both from Gods and men, are, in the first place, sufficiently punished by a disposition [*i.e.* by a depravity] of this kind.⁴



¹ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 1.37.3; tr. Frazer

² [Urge to abstain]

³ [Trifling talk]

⁴ *On abstinence from animal food*, Bk. IV, 16; tr. Taylor

Claims that Pythagoras was not a strict vegetarian are counterbalanced by Apollonius.

Pythagoras used no vegetable more often than beans; he also ate young pigs and goats, alleges Aristoxenus.

Aristoxenus the musician, a man thoroughly versed in early literature, a pupil of the philosopher Aristotle, in the book *On Pythagoras* which he has left us, says that Pythagoras used no vegetable more often than beans, since that food gently loosened the bowels and relieved them. I add Aristoxenus' own words:¹

Pythagoras among vegetables especially recommended the bean, saying that it was both digestible and loosening; and therefore he most frequently made use of it.

Aristoxenus also relates that Pythagoras ate very young pigs and tender kids.² This fact he seems to have learned from his intimate friend Xenophilus the Pythagorean and from some other older men, who lived not long after the time of Pythagoras. And the same information about animal food is given by the poet Alexis, in the comedy entitled *The Pythagorean Bluestocking*.^{3,4}

Plutarch repeats the same allegation, says Gellius.

Plutarch too, a man of weight in scientific matters, in the first book of his work *On Homer* wrote that Aristotle⁵ gave the same account of the Pythagoreans: namely, that except for a few parts of the flesh they did not abstain from eating animals. Since the statement is contrary to the general belief, I have appended Plutarch's own words:⁶

Aristotle says that the Pythagoreans abstained from the matrix, the heart, the *ἀκαλήφη* and some other such things, but used all other animal food.

Now the *ἀκαλήφη* is a marine creature which is called the sea-nettle. But Plutarch in his *Table Talk* says⁷ that the Pythagoreans also abstained from mullets.

¹ F.H.G., II, 273

² [*hædis*, a young goat]

³ Fr. 199, Kock

⁴ Aulus Cornelius Gellius, *Noctes Atticæ* (Attic Nights); tr. J.C. Rolfe. First published in 1927 in three volumes, as part of the Loeb Classical Library; Loeb Vol. I, Bk. IV, 11.

⁵ Fr. 194, Rose

⁶ VII, p. 100, Bern

⁷ VII, I, 8

But as to Pythagoras himself, while it is well known that he declared that he had come into the world as Euphorbus, what Cleanthes¹ and Dicæarchus² have recorded is less familiar — that he was afterwards Pyrrhus Pyranthius, then Æthalides, and then a beautiful courtesan, whose name was Alco.³

Counterpoise **1.**
The story of the fishermen, as retold by Porphyry, suggests that Pythagoras absolutely abstained from fish.

While at the Olympic games, he was discoursing with his friends about auguries, meeting with some fishermen who were drawing in their nets heavily laden with fishes from the deep, he predicted the exact number of fish they had caught. The fishermen said that if his estimate was accurate they would do whatever he commanded. They counted them accurately, and found the number correct. He then bade them to return the fish alive into the sea; and, what is more wonderful, not one of them died, although they had been out of the water a considerable time.⁴

Counterpoise **2.**
Eudoxus maintains that Pythagoras not only abstained from animal flesh, he also kept clear of butchers and hunters.

These accomplishments are the more generally known, but the rest are less celebrated. Moreover Eudoxus, in the second book of his *Description of the Earth*, writes that Pythagoras practiced the greatest purity, and was shocked at all bloodshed and killing; that he not only abstained from animal food, but never in any way approached butchers or hunters.⁵

Counterpoise **3.**
Apollonius of Tyana, more Pythagorean than Pythagoras himself, has always maintained his purity by shunning animal flesh as well as animal clothing.⁶

Now my own system of wisdom is that of Pythagoras, a man of Samos, who taught me to worship the gods in the way you see, and to be aware of them whether they are seen or not seen, and to be frequent in my converse with them, and to dress myself in this land-wool; for it was never worn by sheep, but is the spotless product of spotless parents, the gift of water and of earth, namely linen. And the very fashion of letting my hair grow long, I have learnt from Pythagoras as part of his discipline, and also it is a result of his wisdom that I keep myself pure from animal food.

I cannot therefore become either for you or for anybody else a companion in drinking or an associate in idleness and luxury; but if you have problems of conduct that are

¹ *F.H.G.*, II, 317

² *ibid.*, II, 244

³ A.C. Gellius, *Noctes Atticæ* (Attic Nights); tr. J.C. Rolfe. First published in 1927 in three volumes, as part of the Loeb Classical Library; Loeb Vol. I, Bk. IV, 11.

⁴ Porphyrius, *Vita Pythagoræ*, 25; tr. Guthrie. [Full text in our Buddhas and Initiates Series. — ED. PHIL.]

⁵ *ibid.*, 7

⁶ Cf. Counterpoise 4 below.

difficult and hard to settle, I will furnish you with solutions, for I not only know matters of practice and duty, but I even know them beforehand.¹

For I discerned a certain sublimity in the discipline of Pythagoras, and how a certain secret wisdom enabled him to know, not only who he was himself, but also who he had been; and I saw that he approached the altars in purity, and suffered not his belly to be polluted by partaking of the flesh of animals and that he kept his body pure of all garments woven of dead animal refuse; and that he was the first of mankind to restrain his tongue, inventing a discipline of silence described in the proverbial phrase,

An ox sits upon it.²

Pythagoras might have sacrificed cocks and pigs or eat the flesh of sacrificed animals, claims Porphyry.

As to food, his breakfast was chiefly of honey; at dinner he used bread made of millet, barley or herbs, raw and boiled. Only rarely did he eat the flesh of sacrificial victims, nor did he take this from every part of the anatomy.³ When he intended to sojourn in the sanctuaries of the divinities, he would eat no more than was necessary to still hunger and thirst. To quiet hunger he made a mixture of poppy seed and sesame, the skin of a sea-onion, well washed until entirely drained of the outward juices, of the flowers of the daffodil, and the leaves of mallows, of paste of barley and chick peas, taking an equal weight of which, and chopping it small, with honey of Hymettus he made it into a mass. Against thirst he took the seed of cucumbers, and the best dried raisins, extracting the seeds, and coriander flowers, and the seeds of mallows, purslane, scraped cheese, wheat meal and cream, all of which he mixed up with wild honey.

He claimed that this diet had, by Demeter, been taught to Hercules, when he was sent into the Libyan deserts. This preserved his body in an unchanging condition, not at one time well, and at another time sick, nor at one time fat, and at another lean. Pythagoras' countenance showed the same constancy that was also in his soul. For he was neither more elated by pleasure, nor dejected by grief, and no one ever saw him either rejoicing or mourning.

But when he worked out that the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle was equal to the squares on the sides containing the right angle, Pythagoras sacrificed an ox made of flour, admits the disciple of Plotinus.

When Pythagoras sacrificed to the Gods, he did not use offensive profusion, but offered no more than barley bread, cakes and myrrh, least of all animals, unless per-

¹ Philostratus, *Apollonius of Tyana*, Vol. I, Bk. III, § 32, p. 91; (tr. Conybeare)

² *ibid.*, Vol. II, Bk. VI, § 11, p. 39; (tr. Conybeare)

³ Cf. "The loins he called a foundation, because on them as on foundations living beings are settled. Testicles and genitals he called beginning for no one is engendered without the help of these. The brain he called increase, as it is the cause of growth in living beings. The source was the feet, and the head the end, since it has the most power in the government of the body. He likewise advised abstention from beans, as if from human flesh."

Porphyrius, *Vita Pythagoræ*, 43; tr. Guthrie

haps cocks and pigs. When he discovered the proposition that the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle was equal to the squares on the sides containing the right angle, he is said to have sacrificed an ox, although the more accurate say that this ox was made of flour.¹

Counterpoise **4.**
Following Pythagoras' example, Apollonius sacrificed a bull made out of frankincense.

And when he had gone up into the temple, he was struck by the orderliness of its arrangements, and thought the reason given for everything thoroughly religious and wisely framed. But as for the blood of bulls and the sacrifices of geese and other animals, he disapproved of them nor would he bring them to repasts of the gods. And when a priest asked him what induced him not to sacrifice like the rest:

Nay, you should rather answer me what induces you to sacrifice in this way, replied Apollonius.

And who is so clever that he can make corrections in the rites of the Egyptians? replied the priest.

Anyone, with a little wisdom, if only he comes from India. And I will roast a bull to ashes this very day, and you shall hold communion with us in the smoke it makes; for you cannot complain, if you only get the same portion which is thought enough of a repast for the gods.

And as his image² was being melted in the fire he said:

Look at the sacrifice.

What sacrifice, for I do not see anything there, said the Egyptian.

The Iamidæ and the Telliadæ and the Clytiadæ and the oracle of the black-footed ones, have they talked a lot of nonsense, most excellent priest, when they went on at such length about fire, and pretended to gather so many oracles from it? For as to the fire from pine wood and from the cedar, do you think it is really fraught with prophecy and capable of revealing anything, and yet not esteem a fire lit from the richest and purest gum to be much preferable? If then you had really any acquaintance with the lore of fire worship, you would see that many things are revealed in the disc of the sun at the moment of its rising, said Apollonius.³

¹ Porphyrius, *Vita Pythagoræ*, 34-36; tr. Guthrie. [Full text in our Buddhas and Initiates Series. — ED. PHIL.]

² A frankincense model of a bull.

³ Philostratus, *Apollonius of Tyana*, Vol. I, Bk. V, § 25, p. 519; (tr. Conybeare)

More! The Tyanean Theurgist never sacrificed blood and never touched it, not even if it was shed upon an altar.

I never sacrificed blood, I do not sacrifice it now, I never touch it, not even if it be shed upon an altar; for this was the rule of Pythagoras and likewise of his disciples, and in Egypt also of the Naked sages, and of the sages of India, from whom these principles of wisdom were derived by Pythagoras and his school.

In adhering to this way of sacrifice they do not seem to the gods to be criminal; for the latter suffer them to grow old, sound in body and free from disease, and to increase in wisdom daily, to be free from tyranny of others, to be wanting in nothing. Nor do I think that it is absurd to ask the gods for benefits in exchange for pure sacrifices. For I believe that the gods have the same mind as myself in the matter of sacrifice, and that they therefore place those parts of the earth which grow frankincense in the purest region of the world, in order that we may use their resources for purposes of sacrifice without drawing the knife in their temples or shedding blood upon altars. And yet, it appears, I so far forgot myself and the gods as to sacrifice with rites which are not only unusual with myself, but which no human being would employ.¹

He berated those who whet their knife against the children of the earth in order to get themselves dress and food.

O divine Pythagoras, do thou defend me upon these counts; for we are put upon our trial for a rule of life of which thou wast the discoverer, and of which I am the humble partisan.

For the earth, my prince,² grows everything for mankind; and those who are pleased to live at peace with the brute creation want nothing, for some fruits they can cull from earth, others they win from her furrows, for she is the nurse of men, as suits the seasons; but these men, as it were deaf to the cries of mother earth, whet their knife against her children in order to get themselves dress and food.

He himself has always been clad in linen.

Here then is something which the Brahmans of India themselves condemned, and which they taught the naked sages of Egypt also to condemn; and from them Pythagoras took his rule of life, and he was the first of Hellenes who had intercourse with the Egyptians. And it was his rule to give up and leave her animals to the earth; but all things which she grows, he declared, were pure and undefiled, and ate of them accordingly, because they were best adapted to nourish both body and soul. But the garments which most men wear made of the hides of dead animals, he declared to be impure; and accordingly clad himself in linen, and on the same principles had his shoes woven of byblus.^{3, 4}

¹ Philostratus, *Apollonius of Tyana*, Vol. II, Bk. VIII, § 7.12, p. 339; (tr. Conybeare)

² [Emperor Titus Flavius Cæsar Domitianus Augustus]

³ [Papyrus plant, *Cyperus papyrus*.]

⁴ *op. cit.*, Vol. II, Bk. VIII, § 4, pp. 303-5; [Apollonius' *Apologia pro vita sua* prepared for his trial before Emperor Domitian. However, the defence has never been delivered.]

In what way is linen better than wool?

Was not the latter taken from the back of the gentlest of animals, of a creature beloved of the gods, who do not disdain themselves to be shepherds, and, by Zeus, once held the fleece to be worthy of a golden form,¹ if it was really a god that did so, and if it be not a mere story?

On the other hand linen is grown and sown anywhere, and there is no talk of gold in connection with it. Nevertheless, because it is not plucked from the back of a living animal, the Indians regard it as pure, and so do the Egyptians, and I myself and Pythagoras on this account have adopted it as our garb when we are discoursing or praying or offering sacrifice. And it is a pure substance under which to sleep of a night, for to those who live as I do dreams bring the truest of their revelations.²

Counterpoise **5.** **Noting that men and beans arose out of putrefaction, Pythagoras forbid the consumption of beans as well as of human flesh.**

Beans were forbidden, it is said, because the particular plants grow and individualize only after that which is the principle and origin of things is mixed together, so that many things underground are confused, and coalesce, after which everything rots together. Then living creatures were produced together with plants, so that both men and beans arose out of putrefaction, whereof he alleged many manifest arguments. For if anyone should chew a bean, and having ground it to a pulp with his teeth, and should expose that pulp to the warm sun for a short while, and then return to it, he will perceive the scent of human blood. Moreover, if at the time when beans bloom, one should take a little of the flower, which is then black, and should put it into an earthen vessel, and cover it closely, and bury it in the ground for ninety days, and at the end thereof take it up, and uncover it, instead of the bean he will find that either the head of an infant or the pudenda of a woman has developed.³

Counterpoise **6.** **Five centuries later, the Cappadocian Adept sternly rebuked the gladiatorial barbarities of the Athenians that were taking place in the Theatre of Dionysus Eleuthereus on the southern slope of their Acropolis.**

[Apollonius] also corrected the following abuse at Athens. The Athenians ran in crowds to the theatre beneath the Acropolis to witness human slaughter, and the passion for such sports was stronger there than it is in Corinth today; for they would buy for large sums adulterers and fornicators and burglars and cut-purses and kidnappers and such-like rabble, and then they took them and armed them and set them to fight with one another. Apollonius then attacked these practices, and when the Athenians invited him to attend their assembly, he refused to enter a place so impure and reeking with gore.

¹ [The fleece of the gold-hair winged ram from the Black Sea in Colchis. For an explanation of the allegory see Suda Online, <http://www.stoa.org/sol/>]

² *op. cit.*, Vol. II, Bk. VIII, § 5, p. 307

³ Porphyrius, *Vita Pythagoræ*, 44; tr. Guthrie

And this he said in an epistle to them; he said that he was surprised that:

. . . the goddess [Athena] had not already quitted the Acropolis, when you shed such blood under her eyes. For I suspect that presently, when you are conducting the pan-Athenaic procession, you will no longer be content with bull, but will be sacrificing hecatombs of men to the goddess. And thou, O Dionysus, dost thou after such bloodshed frequent their theatre? And do the wise among the Athenians pour libations to thee there? Nay do thou depart, O Dionysus. Holier and purer is thy Cithæron.

Such were the more serious of the subjects which I have found he treated of at that time in Athens in his philosophical discourses.¹

Counterpoise **7.**
He provided evidence of the utter futility of human sacrifices . . .

And how, my prince,² are you to rate the improbability of the sacrifice?

For of course there have been long ago soothsayers skilled in the art of examining slain victims, for example I can name Megistias of Acarnania, Aristandrus of Lycia, and Silanus who was a native of Ambracia, and of these the Acarnanian was sacrificed to Leonidas the king of Sparta, and the Lycian to Alexander of Macedonia, and Silanus to Cyrus the Pretender; and supposing there had been found stored in the entrails of a human being some information truer or more profound or surer than usual, such a sacrifice was not difficult to effect; inasmuch as there were kings to preside over it, who had plenty of cup-bearers at their disposal, besides plenty of prisoners of war as victims; and moreover these monarchs could violate the law with impunity, and they had no fear of being accused, in case they committed so small a murder.

But I believe, these persons had the same conviction which I also entertain, who am now in risk of my life of such accusation, namely that the entrails of animals which we slay while they are ignorant of death, are for that reason, and just because the animals lack all understanding of what they are about to suffer, free from disturbance. A human being however has constantly in his soul the apprehension of death, even when it does not as yet impend; how therefore is it likely that when death is already present and stares him in the face, he should be able to give any intimation of the future through his entrails, or be a proper subject for sacrifice at all?

In proof that my conjecture is right and consonant with nature, I would ask you, my prince, to consider the following points.

- The liver, in which adepts at this art declare the tripod of their divination to reside, is on the one hand not composed of pure blood, for all unmixed blood is retained by the heart which through the blood-vessels sends it flowing as if through canals over the entire body;
- The bile on the other hand lies over the liver, and whereas it is excited by anger, it is on the other hand driven back by fear into the cavities of the liver.

¹ Philostratus, *Apollonius of Tyana*, Vol. I, Bk. IV, § 22, pp. 397; (tr. Conybeare)

² [Emperor Titus Flavius Cæsar Domitianus Augustus]

Accordingly if,

On the one hand, it is caused to effervesce by irritants, and ceases to be able to contain itself in its own receptacle, it overflows the liver which underlies it, in which case the mass of bile occupies the smooth and prophetic parts of the bowels;

On the other hand, under the influence of fear and panic it subsides, and draws together into itself all the light which resides in the smooth parts; for in such cases even that pure element in the blood recedes to which the liver owes its spleen-like look and distension, because the blood in question by its nature drains away under the membrane which encloses the entrails and floats upon the muddy surface.

Of what use then, my prince, is it to slay a human victim, if the sacrifice is going to furnish no presage?

. . . and of cocks, pigs, and bulls being unworthy vehicles of divination.

And human nature does render such rites useless for purposes of divination, because it has a sense of impending death; and dying men themselves meet their end, if with courage, then also with anger, and, if with despondency, then also with fear. And for this reason the art of divination, except in the case of the most ignorant savages, while recommending the slaying of kids and lambs, because these animals are silly and not far removed from being insensible, does not consider cocks and pigs and bulls worthy vehicles of its mysteries, because these creatures have too much spirit.¹

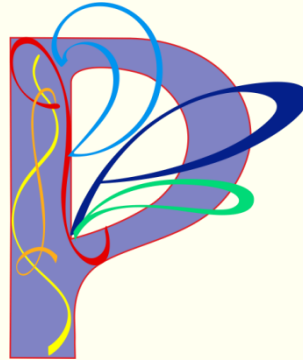


¹ Philostratus, *Apollonius of Tyana*, Vol. II, Bk. VIII, § 15, pp. 345-49; tr. Conybeare; [Apollonius' *Apologia pro vita sua* prepared for his trial before Emperor Domitian. However, the defence has never been delivered.]

Food for thought.

The ban of beans is far older than Pythagoras, as evidenced by the Orphic Hymn to Earth, where the sacrificer is ordered to fumigate from every kind of seed, except beans and aromatics.¹

For Earth is Hestia-Vesta,² and Vesta is comprehended together with Hera-Juno in Demeter-Ceres, notes Thomas Taylor.³



¹ [T. Taylor, *The Mystical Hymns of Orpheus* (or Initiations) *being Invocations used in the Eleusinian Mysteries*. Chiswick 1824, 2nd ed.; Hymn XXVI, "To Earth," p. 62; p. 70 in the Prometheus Trust revised edition of 2003. See also "Orpheus' legend and works" in our Hellenic and Hellenistic Papers. — ED. PHIL.]

² [See etymology in C.A. Bartzokas (*Comp. & Ed.*). *Compassion: The Spirit of Truth*, Gwernymynydd: Philaletheians UK, 2005; v. 05.88.2021, p. 19. This is our first Major Work. — ED. PHIL.]

³ Cf. T. Taylor, *op. cit.*, Introduction, pp. xxxiv-vi; p. 13 in the Prometheus Trust edition.

Suggested reading for students.



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