

Some Pythagorean female virtues*

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As is known from the sources, Pythagorean societies included both men and women in perfect equality. Admittance to the community was after strict examination and under the condition of years of silence.¹ The requirements for initiation into the Pythagorean philosophy, and the subsequent duties, were common to both men and women without exception. Women, however, were further assigned some extra duties, which, according to the Pythagoreans, were proper to their sex. Thus, although we treat Pythagorean morals as a whole, without distinction between men and women, we cannot ignore some, perhaps later, peculiarities concerning the morals of women.

Apart from scientific differences, it is certain that the Pythagorean school was distinguished from similar ones by its moral direction. According to several scholars, the Pythagorean school, as its way of life, morals, beliefs and political pursuits showed, undoubtedly originated from moral and religious motives.² But a real picture of its moral tendencies and orientations cannot be accurately drawn from later descriptions. Pythagoras undoubtedly had the intention of establishing a seed-plot for the cultivation of piety and strict principles of temperance, order, obedience to rulers and to the law, bravery, loyal friendship and, generally, all those virtues which, according to the Greek and especially the Dorian perspective, characterize the brave man, and which are particularly stressed in the Pythagorean apophthegms on morals.

It has been claimed that the Pythagorean doctrines remained carefully confined to the limits of the school and that any transgression was followed by a severe reprimand. It is unlikely, regardless of their symbolic religious meaning, that the philosophical doctrines and the mathematical theorems were kept secret. Besides, the distinction between internal and external students in the Pythagorean

organization was due to other reasons than secrecy.³ Pythagoras was interested in spreading his doctrines on virtue, and contradictory evidence either reflects popular beliefs or dates from much later.

The Pythagoreans exacted above all worship of gods and demons, and a genuine respect for parents and for the laws and traditions of one's native town, which should not be frivolously replaced by foreign ones. They considered anarchy as a major vice, for they believed that it is not possible for the human race to live and thrive without some kind of authority. Rulers and ruled ought to be bound together by mutual friendship: ἄρχοντας ἔφασκον οὐ μόνον ἐπιστήμονας ἀλλὰ καὶ φιλανθρώπους δεῖν εἶναι καὶ τοὺς ἀρχομένους οὐ μόνον πειθηνίους ἀλλὰ καὶ φιλάρχοντας.⁴ Each citizen must subordinate himself to the whole. The young and the adolescent must be educated for the state; the men of mature years and the old must act for it. The Pythagorean philosophy also recommends loyalty, trust and tolerance in friendship; obedience of the young to the older; gratitude towards parents and benefactors. He who possesses a true love for the beautiful will not turn to external luxury, but to moral activity and to internal self-sufficiency. Science flourishes only where it is practised with zeal and love. In fact, this Pythagorean belief may account for several prohibitions, symbolisms⁵ and regulations (διατάξεις). In some cases, man is dependent upon luck, but in most he is the master of his own destiny.

From the same spirit derive the moral 'regulations' of the Golden Verses, which are addressed to both men and women: respect towards gods and parents, loyalty towards friends, justice and tolerance towards everyone, temperance, propriety, modesty, self-discipline, prudence, chastity, wisdom, submission to destiny, regular self-control, prayer, attendance at holy ceremonies, abstinence from impure fare, approaching temples in clean attire and with a clear mind, avoidance of extravagant desires, keeping secrets and sworn oaths. If all these duties are fulfilled, there is hope for a blissful lot after death.⁶ Faith in a posthumous recompense enjoined an absolute acceptance of the moral order in the family, the state and social contact in general.

Originally, ἀρετή (the Latin *virtus*) did not have an ethical meaning for the Presocratic philosophers. It had meant the group of qualities that make man extraordinary and perfect, so that he excels among others. Some scholars argue that, no matter how unquestionable the religious and moral nature of Pythagoreanism, it is not possible to claim that Pythagoreanism established an ethical system. Ethos, for

the Pythagoreans, is confused with religion, and religion has two aspects: one is purely theoretical, where natural science is reduced to the science of numbers; the other is purely practical, and reduced to deeds and rituals. Ethical life has the purpose of liberating the soul from passions, which keep it a slave to the body, and of giving it absolute freedom; for the soul knows no other law or bonds other than those of reason and action.⁷

Pythagorean philosophy and its followers' way of life helped them to achieve divine perfection. Philosophy is an arduous task indeed, and a philosopher is one who seeks to conceive the universe as *cosmos* (a word which etymologically means ornament), as a harmonious order of beauty, and to achieve this beauty of harmony in his personal life. Pythagoreanism teaches the virtues of devotion, faith, piety and measure through harmony as a dominating principle.⁸ Human life is an effort, a trial, and death is not its end but only a transition towards regeneration according to the laws of just recompense.

We know that the primary concern of Pythagoreanism was the study of order, propriety or *κοσμιότης* (notice the etymological connection with 'cosmos') rather than the material essence of the universe or natural changes: that is why they tried to comply with 'cosmic' laws. The concept of propriety and harmony in moral life was expounded by Perictione in her work, *On Woman's Harmony*:⁹

τὴν ἁρμονίην γυναῖκα γώσασθαί δεῖ φρονησέως καὶ σωφροσύνης πλείην· κάρτα γὰρ ψυχὴν πειθνῦσθαι δεῖ ἐξ ἀρετῆν, ὥστ' ἔσται καὶ δικαίη καὶ ἀνδρηίη καὶ φρονέουσα καὶ αὐταρκείη καλλυνομένη καὶ κενὴν δόξαν μασέουσα.

One must deem the harmonious woman to be full of wisdom and self-control; a soul must be exceedingly conscious of goodness to be just and courageous and wise, embellished with self-sufficiency and hating empty opinion.

(trans. V.L. Harper)

For woman, harmony is prudence and temperance. These virtues are also found recommended by Pythagoras in his 'speech' to women. A woman's soul, says Pythagoras, must seek virtue in order to become just, brave, reasonable, self-sufficient, by qualities adapted to her nature, and disliking vain glory. The harmonious nature of woman must not be disturbed by lack of wealth, noble descent, glory or other things that are often more harmful than useful and cause envy and hate:

ἀναγκαῖα δὲ μὴ ἡγεέσθω εὐγενίην καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ . . . μεγάλης πόλιος . . . καὶ δόξαν καὶ φιλίην ἐνδόξων καὶ βασιληῶν ἀνδρῶν· ἦν μὲν ἔη, οὐ λυπέει· ἦν δὲ μὴ ἔη, ἐπιζητέειν οὐ ποιέει· τούτων γὰρ δίκαια φρονίμη γυνὴ ζῆν οὐ κωλύεται. κῆν ἔη δὲ ταῦτα ἄπερ λελάκαται, τὰ μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαζόμενα μὴ ποτε διζέσθω ψυχὴ . . . βλάπτει γὰρ μᾶλλον ἐς ἀτυκίην ἔλκοντα ἢ ὠφέλεει. τούτοις γὰρ ἐπιβουλή τε καὶ φθόνος, καὶ βασκανίη προσκείνεται, ὥστε ἐν ἀταραξίῃ οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο ἡ τοιήδε.¹⁰

But let her not think that nobility of birth, and wealth, and coming from a great city altogether are necessities, nor the good opinion and friendship of eminent and kingly men. If these should be the case, it does not hurt. But, if not, wishing does not make them so. Even if these should be allotted to her, let her soul not pursue the grand and wonderful. Let her walk also apart from them. They harm more than they help, dragging one into misfortune. Treachery and envy and malice abide with them; such a woman would not be serene.

The prudent woman, without refusing any material goods she happens to own, should not pursue 'the grand and the wonderful'. A woman's conduct does not concern herself alone, but is reflected upon the whole family. Woman is the most basic foundation of an *oikos* (household), as perceived and hallowed by the Pythagoreans.

We know that there was a connection between ethics and politics in Pythagorean society. Ethics becomes prominent in politics. Perictione, inspired by these Pythagorean doctrines, presents this most clearly:

πολλάκις δὲ καὶ πόλει, εἰ γε πόλις ἢ ἔθνεα ἢ τοίη γε κρατύνοι, ὡς ἐπὶ βασιλείῃς ὀρέομεν¹¹

If, at any rate, such a woman should govern cities and tribes, as we see in the case of a royal city.

She might have had in mind the great queens Semiramis, Tomyris and Artemisia, who excited great admiration in antiquity. It is therefore obvious that Perictione does not exclude Pythagorean women from participating in politics. What is of importance here is that the distinction between *oikos* (household) for females and *polis* (city) for males does not hold.

In the following passage, Perictione is deeply animated by the moral principles of earlier Pythagoreans:¹²

κρατέουσα ὦν ἐπιθυμίας καὶ θυμοῦ, ὁσίη καὶ ἁρμονίη γίγνεται ὥστε οὐδὲ ἔρωτες αὐτὴν ἄνομοι διώξουσιν, ἀλλ' ἐς ἄνδρα τε καὶ τέκνα καὶ τὸν οἶκον ξυμπαντα φιλήν ἔξει. ὁκόσα γὰρ ἐραάστριαι τελέθουσιν ἀλλοτριῶν λεχέων, αὐται δὲ πολέμια γίγνονται πάντων τῶν ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἐλευθέρων τε καὶ οἰκετέων καὶ συντιθῆ ψύθη καὶ δόλους ἄνδρῶν καὶ ψεύδεα καὶ πάντων μυθίζεταί πρὸς τοῦτον, ἵνα μούνη δοκῆ διαφθέρειν εὐνοίη καὶ τῆς οἰκίης κρατῆ ἀργίην φιλέουσα. ἐκ τούτων γὰρ φθορὴ γίγνεται ξυμπάντων ὁκόσα αὐτῇ τε καὶ τῷ ἀνδρὶ ξυνὰ ἔστι.

Having mastery over appetite and high feeling, she will be righteous and harmonious; no lawless desires will impel her. She will preserve a loving disposition towards her husband and children and entire household. As many women as become lovers of alien beds become enemies of all at home, gentry and servants alike. Such a woman continually contrives lies and deceits for her husband and fabricates falsehoods about everything to him, in order that she may seem to excel in good will and, though she loves idleness, may seem to govern the house to such an extent, let these things be said.

The Pythagorean beliefs about illegitimate liaisons were the strictest of all those expressed by other ancient philosophers. They were the only ones to judge illegitimate relationships that were tolerated by common law. That is, not only did they prohibit what was condemned by the law, namely the wife's unfaithfulness to her husband, but they also regarded the husband's unfaithfulness to the wife as equally unjust despite the prevailing local custom; for the Pythagoreans professed complete equality between men and women. Moreover, they did not distinguish between social classes in the discharge of social duties. Both free men and slaves were on an equal footing.

Pythagoras urges a life lived 'chastely and piously', and Perictione talks about temperance of desires. A woman must be 'righteous' (ὁσίη) and 'harmonious' (ἁρμονίη). The conduct of a law-breaking, deceiving or lying woman is both pitiable and improper and, furthermore, it disturbs the harmony of her soul. This is why Perictione recommends harmony and love for one's family, husband, children and domestics. Virtue is harmony, and so is every other good quality. All these are in agreement with the Pythagorean beliefs about women, as derived from the Master's speech to the women of Croton:

παραγγεῖλαι δὲ καὶ κατὰ πάντα τὸν βίον αὐτάς τε εὐφημεῖν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ὄραν ὅποσα ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν εὐφημήσουσιν, ἵνα τὴν δόξαν τὴν διαδεδομένην μὴ καταλύσωσι μηδὲ τοὺς μυθογράφους ἐξελέγξωσιν, οἱ θεωποῦντες τὴν τῶν γυναικῶν δικαιοσύνην ἐκ τοῦ προίεσθαι μὲν ἀμάρτυρον τὸν ἱματισμὸν καὶ τὸν κόσμον, ὅταν τινι ἄλλῳ δέη χρῆσαι, μὴ γίγνεσθαι δὲ ἐκ τῆς πίστεως δίκας μηδ' ἀντλογίας, ἐμυθοποίησαν τρεῖς γυναῖκας ἐνὶ κοινῷ πάσας ὀφθαλμῶ χρωμένας διὰ τὴν κοινοίαν.

(Iambl. *VP* 55)¹³

He also exhorted the women to use words of good omen through the whole of life, and to endeavour that others may predict good things of them. He likewise admonished them not to destroy popular renown, nor to blame the writers of fables, who surveying the justice of women, from their accommodating others with garments and ornaments, without a witness, when it is necessary for some other person to use them, and that neither litigation nor contradiction are produced from this confidence, – have feigned that three women used but one eye in common, an account of the facility of the communion with each other.

(trans. T. Taylor)

The order εὐφημεῖν (to use words of good omen), as addressed to women, is fully adapted to the ancient Greek conception of women's position in society, which hardly differs from modern Greek reality. Εὐφημία, or good reputation for a woman, was absolute silence about her name, as is similarly reported by Thucydides.¹⁴

Pythagoras, according to Iamblichus, characterizes women as 'just' (δικαίας) because they are willing to share their possessions with others and do this with great generosity. Perictione repeats this, as we saw on p. 124 (δικαίη καὶ ἀνδρογῆ). This is brave behaviour on the part of women and is never observed among men. Trust without witnesses or oaths is another Pythagorean female virtue.

The virtue of female simplicity, as professed by Pythagoras, is also repeated by Perictione: αὐταρκεῖη καλλυνομένη καὶ κενὴν δόξαν μισέουσα ('embellished with self-sufficiency and hating all empty opinion'). As is known, the great philosopher influenced women and children through his personal prestige towards temperance and frugality, and recommended the avoidance of luxury; and in this almost all our sources are in agreement.

Next Pythagoras treats the subject of 'temperance':

ἔφεξις δὲ ἔλεγε περὶ σωφροσύνης . . . εἶτα προετρέπετο θεωρεῖν ὅτι μόνης τῶν ἀρετῶν ταύτης καὶ παιδὶ καὶ παρθένῳ καὶ γυναικὶ καὶ τῇ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων τάξει ἀντιποιεῖσθαι προσήκει, καὶ μάλιστα τοῖς νεωτέροις ἐτι δὲ μόνην αὐτὴν ἀπέφαινε περιεληφέναι καὶ τὰ τοῦ σώματος ἀγαθὰ . . . τῶν γὰρ βαρβάρων καὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων περὶ τὴν Τροίαν ἀνταξαμένον ἑκατέρους δι' ἑνὸς ἀκρασίαν ταῖς δεινοτάτας περιπεσεῖν συμφοραῖς.

(Iambl. *VP* 41–2)

In the next place, he spoke concerning temperance . . . afterwards he exhorted them to consider that this alone among the virtues was adapted to a boy and a virgin, to a woman, and to the order of those of a more advanced age; and that it was especially accommodated to the younger part of the community. He also added that this virtue alone comprehended the goods both of body and soul . . . for when the barbarians and the Greeks warred against one another about Troy, each of them fell into the most dreadful calamities, through the incontinence of one man.

Besides frugality, temperance is presented as a fundamental virtue for everyone and as one of primary importance both for the mind and for the soul. In the passage, the 'virgin' is distinct from the 'woman', and the word ἀκρασία (incontinence) is used instead of ἀκράτεια (intemperance). At any rate, it is the opposite of the virtue of ἐγκράτεια (temperance).

The fact that measure, order and harmony were held by the early Pythagoreans to be the foundations of moral and social life is also known from Plato's *Gorgias*.¹⁵ There Plato says that the Pythagorean 'wise men' profess social contact, friendship, propriety and justice as cosmic principles. The same holds good for the terms φιλία (friendship) and φιλανθρωπία (philanthropy) in the passage. Next he urges us to notice the 'geometric equality' and the 'concord' among them.

A continuity of Pythagorean 'prudence', in the narrow sense of women's prudence, is found in Phintys' *On Woman's Prudence*.¹⁶ The virtues are now determined and distinguished among the sexes:

τὸ μὲν ὅλον ἀγαθὸν δεῖ ἡμεῖς καὶ κοσμίαν· ἄνευ γὰρ ἀρετῶν οὐδέποκα γένοιτό τις τοιαύτα. ἑκάστα γὰρ ἀρετὰ περὶ ἕκαστον γιγνόμενα τὸ αὐτὰς δεκτικὸν ἀποδίδωσι σπουδαῖον.

A woman must be altogether good and orderly; without excellence she would never become so. The excellence appropriate to each thing makes superior that which is receptive of it.

According to Phintys, a woman should become good and decent, and without virtue she cannot become such. The female virtue *par excellence* is prudence, which is suitable for women, as eye virtue is for eyes, ear virtue for ears and so on.¹⁷

ἅ μὲν ὀπίλων τὼς ὀπίως, ἅ δὲ τᾶς ἀκοᾶς τὰν ἀκοάν, καὶ ἅ μὲν ἵππῳ τὸν ἵππον, ἅ δ' ἄνδρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα· οὕτω δὲ καὶ <ἅ> γυναικὸς τὰν γυναικα. γυναικὸς δὲ μάλιστα ἀρετὰ σωφροσύνα.

The excellence appropriate to the eyes makes the eyes so, that appropriate to hearing, the faculty of hearing, that appropriate to a horse, a horse, that appropriate to a man, a man. So too the excellence appropriate to a woman makes a woman excellent. The excellence most appropriate to a woman is moderation.

The main female virtue, therefore, is moderation. According to this Pythagorean, there are occupations which are suitable for men and others which are suitable for women. There are also virtues which are common to both men and women.¹⁸

ἴδια μὲν ἄνδρὸς τὸ στρατηγὲν καὶ πολιτεύεσθαι καὶ δαμαγορέν, ἴδια δὲ γυναικὸς τὸ οἰκουρέν καὶ ἔνδον μένειν καὶ ἐκδέχεσθαι καὶ θεραπεύειν τὸν ἄνδρα. κοινὰ δὲ φαιμί ἀνδρείαν καὶ δικαιοσύναν καὶ φρόνασιν.

I agree that men should be generals and city officials and politicians, and women should keep house and stay inside and receive and take care of their husbands. But I believe that courage, justice and intelligence are qualities that men and women have in common.

(trans. M.R. Lefkowitz)

This passage reveals clearly: first, a deviation from Pythagorean beliefs, as we know them from speeches attributed to Pythagoras; second, the much later language of the text; third, that these words would fit better in a fourth- or third-century BC Ionian or Athenian setting, if they had been written in the Attic dialect. Therefore, Phintys cannot have been Lacedaimonian, particularly as her words are contrary to the ethos of Lacedaimonian state.

With the virtues common to men and women, we come back to the Pythagorean positions without excluding Platonic. One of these common virtues is the health of both body and soul:¹⁹ καὶ ὡς ὑγιαίνει τῷ σώματι ἀμφοτέρους, ὠφέλιμον. οὕτως ὑγιαίνει τῆ ψυχῇ. (And just as it is beneficial for the body of each to be healthy, so too, it is

beneficial for the soul to be healthy.¹⁹) The virtues of the body are health, strength, sensitivity and beauty. There are virtues which are suitable for men, as there are virtues more appropriate for women. Courage and quick resolution are more suitable for man because of the constitution of his body and the strength of his soul. Modest reticence is more appropriate for woman: σωφροσύναν δὲ γυναίκι.²⁰

Without condemning learned women or women philosophers, Phintys recommended, besides intelligence and study, the virtue of prudence, the fruits of which are propriety, modesty and reticence. These virtues give grace to women. With the virtue of prudence, woman τὸν ἴδιον ἄνδρα καὶ τιμὴν καὶ ἀγαπὴν δυνασέεται ('will be able to honour and love her husband'). Conjugal faith is considered to be the first necessary condition for female prudence.

Similarly, another Pythagorean, Melissa, characterizes conjugal faith as 'beautiful': εὐμορφὸν γὰρ τὰν ἐλευθέραν ιδέσθαι τῷ αὐτῆς ἀνδρὶ, ἀλλ' οὐ τοῖς πλάσιον ('a free woman should appear beautiful to her husband, not to outsiders').²¹ According to Melissa, a basic condition for a woman seeking 'prudence' (here she uses a strong verb, γλίχομαι, used by epic and tragic poets, which means 'to desire ardently, to fight for something') is not luxury of attire but, first, the correct management of her home; and, second, her endeavour to be liked by her husband only.

The learned women of that period must have been taking private lessons and must have been familiar with the theories of Xenophon and Aristotle, and this can be concluded from the similarities of their texts.

The following passage by Phintys again can be considered as a sample of the private and public life in ancient Greece, as far as the position of women is concerned:²²

τάς δὲ ἐξόδους ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας ποιῆσθαι τὰς γυναῖκας τὰς δαμοτελέας θυηπολούσας τῷ ἀρχαγέτῃ θεῶ τῆς πόλιος ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν καὶ τῷ ἀνδρὶ καὶ τῷ παντὸς οἴκῳ ἔπειτα μήτε ὄρφνας ἀνισταμένας μήτε ἐσπέρας ἀλλὰ πλαθυούσας ἀγορας καταφανέα γιγνομένα τὰν ἔξοδον ποιῆσθαι θεωρίας ἕνεκα τινος ἢ ἀγορασμῶ οἰκίῳ μετὰ θεραπαίνας μίας ἢ κατὰ πλείστον δύο εὐκόσμως χειραγωγουμένα. τὰς δὲ θυσίας λιτὰς παριστάμεν τοῖς θεοῖς καὶ κατὰν δύναμιν, ὀργιασμῶν δὲ καὶ μητροφασμῶν τῶν κατ' οἶκον ἀπέχεσθαι.

Women of importance leave the house to sacrifice to the leading divinity on behalf of themselves and their husbands and their households. They do not leave home at night nor in the evening

and they make their departures from the market-place openly, to attend a festival or to make some purchase, accompanied by a single female servant or at most leading two servants by the hand. They offer prayers at sacrifice to the gods also to the best of their abilities. They keep away from secret cults and Cybeline orgies in their homes.

The time when the market-place was crowded was the most appropriate for a woman to come out of the women's quarters of the house. Except for the phrase τὰς θυσίας λιτὰς, nothing else here is reminiscent of the Pythagorean tradition.

Man outside the home and woman inside it²³ epitomizes, as is well known, the grandeur of ancient Athenian society. Silence was recommended for women, as well as staying at home. Endless silence. This kind of silence is different from the one that Pythagoras recommended and exacted from his male and female students in order to be certain of their secrecy. He did not accept chatty or ambitious women. Temperance of speech was held to be most difficult to achieve. This silence was called ἐχεμυθία (discretion) or ἐχερρημοσύνη.

Another Pythagorean, Lysis, praises the courage of Damo, Pythagoras' daughter, who followed the Pythagorean tradition and, although she had fallen into extreme poverty, kept Pythagoras' 'memoranda', that is his written works, and refused to hand them over even for big material offers:

λέγοντι δὲ πολλοὶ τὴν καὶ δαμοσίᾳ φιλοσοφῆν, τόπερ ἀπαξίωσε Πυθαγόρας, ὅς γε Δαμοῖ τῆ ἑαυτοῦ θυγατρὶ τὰ ὑπομνήματα παρακαταθέμενος ἐπέκαψε μηδενὶ τῶν ἐκτὸς τῆς οἰκίας παραδίδομεν. ἃ δὲ δυναμένα πολλῶν χρημάτων ἀποδόσθαι τῶς λόγῳ οὐκ ἐβουλάθη, πενίαν δὲ καὶ τῶ πατρὸς ἐπισκαψίας ἐνόμισε χρυσῶ τιμιότερας ἦμεν. φαντὶ δὲ ὅτι καὶ Δαμὼ θνάσκουσα Βιστάλα τῆ ἑαυτῆς θυγατρὶ τὰν αὐτῶν ἐπιτολὰν ἐπέτειλεν.²⁴

Many say you should philosophize in public, which Pythagoras forbade. He carefully set aside his notes, giving them to his daughter, Damo, with the instruction that she was to surrender them to no one outside the household. And she, although she was able to sell his works for much money, declined, thinking poverty and her father's instructions more valuable than gold. They say indeed that when Damo died, she gave the same instruction to her daughter, Bistala.

(trans. R. Hawley)

Lysis complains that even male students of Pythagoras did not manage to reach the heights of Damo and of her daughter Bistala.

Another Pythagorean woman who is mentioned as silent and brave is Timycha,²⁵ wife of Myllios Crotoniates, who cut her own tongue out so as not to give away secrets about Pythagorean beliefs.

Therefore, women fulfilled the requirements asked from them in order to be initiated into Pythagorean philosophy: piety towards the gods, obedience towards parents, absolute devotion to one man (their husband), secrecy, prudence, bravery, harmony, avoidance of luxury, frugality in attire and food and genuine shyness.

One might be surprised at the strictness of the moral principles laid down by female Pythagorean students, and not by Pythagoras himself, in order to keep women inside their homes, occupying themselves with only their duties as wives and overseeing children and maidservants. Woman, as an active member of the household, not in the least inferior to man, in order to become initiated into philosophy, should be even more devoted than he and should strictly keep the moral precepts of the Pythagoreans, which were very strict for both sexes. This strictness may have been aimed at protecting women, and this is related to the great Pythagorean belief that 'people are bad'.

The aim of Pythagoras' 'preaching' was to create a cultural aristocracy and a religion based upon moral principles. No woman can have remained indifferent to the demands of Pythagorean philosophy, which propagated so noble a cause. The Pythagoreans believed in man's natural weakness. They professed that human beings were created to be happy, and the whole organization of private life and the political community was aimed, for them, at creating lasting happiness and making it accessible to everyone.

Philosophy purges. It purges human life by delivering it from the disorder of matter and the corrupting passions of the body. But this has been difficult for man to achieve because our souls, slaves to our bodies, have always been vulnerable to material passions; they have often moved away from god, abstained from concord and order, and gone deeper into the dark labyrinth of impropriety. The Pythagoreans believed that they would prevent so great a danger through hard and strict exercise, which would keep them in continuous touch with the dominating unity of the divine word and the harmonious balance of the hierarchical order of the world. God, being the essence of happiness and thus the only reason for the creation of beings, created for each being a situation that is best suited to it. Therefore, the

continuous submission to order, harmony and the beauty of the universe meant union with this common link that combined everything with the Whole and was nothing else but the will and the thought of god himself.

Finally, there is a point not directly relevant to my paper that I should like to make. I do not accept scholars' recent distinction of the works written by alleged Pythagorean women as I, II, or even III, e.g. Theano I, Theano II, etc. It is useless and pointless. Men may also lie behind these female names, and women may lie behind male. Even if there is a difference in the language, these works may have been written at different stages of the same author's life. This is true especially for the letters: they are all written under pseudonyms, and it would be better if this were made clear first and the name and the content followed: in any case these letters are not characteristic of Pythagorean principles and beliefs.

NOTES

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- 1 Iambl. *VP* 72, cf. 94, 71. Porph. *VP* 19 (= Dicaearchus 33 Wehrli). Diog. Laert. 8.10. Gellius *Noct. Att.* 1, 9. Apul. *Floril.* 2, 15. Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 5, 11, p. 371 Staehlin. Hippolyt. *Haer.*, pp. 555–8. Diels. Lucian *Vit. Auct.* 3.1. Philopon. *In Aristot. De Anima Comment.* 1, 2 p. 69 Hayduck (cf. 5.3, p. 122, 30 Verbeke).
 - 2 Iambl. *VP* 54; cf. 37–8. Diog. Laert. 3.21–3. Pseudo-Pythagoras *Carm. Aur.* 30–1 (= Thesleff 1965: 144, cf. 95–6).
 - 3 Aristox. in Diog. Laert. 8.15; cf. 42, 52. Iambl. *VP* 31, 75, 144. Plut. *Num.* 22. Aristoc. in Eusebius *Praep. Ev.* 11.3.1. *Patr. Graec.* 21, 848a. Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 5.9, p. 364 Staehlin. Porph. *VP* 58. Plat. *Epist.* 3.314a.
 - 4 Pyth. 58D, p. 469.20 Diels-Kranz (= Stob. *Ecl.* 4.25, 45 Hense). Iambl. *VP* 38. Diog. Laert. 8.23.
 - 5 Pyth. 58C, pp. 462–6 Diels-Kranz. Porph. *VP* 41, 42. Diog. Laert. 8.34, 17. Aristot. *Frag. Pyth.* 5, 6, 7 Ross. Iambl. *VP* 82–6. Aelian *Var. Hist.* 4.17. Suda s.v. 'Anaximandros'. Plut. *De lib. educ.* 17 = 12de; *Quaest. Conv.* 7.10 = 727b.
 - 6 Pseudo-Pythagoras *Carm. Aur.*, Thesleff 1965: 159–62. Jerome *Contr. Ruf.* 3.39. Diod. Sic. 10.7–11. Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* 3.6.3 = 654b. Porph. *VP* 22, 38, 39. Iambl. *VP* 34, 55, 132, 171; cf. Cic. *Cato* 2.38; Shakespeare *Twelfth Night* 4.2.50–6, *As You Like It* 2.1.15–17, *Merchant of Venice* 5.1.83–5.
 - 7 Aristot. *Eth. Mag.* 1.1.1182a10–22. Diog. Laert. 8.31.
 - 8 Thesleff 1965: 168, cf. 183–4. Pomp. Trog. 20.4.3, 6–12.
 - 9 Thesleff 1965: 142, 17. See Lambropoulou 1976.
 - 10 Thesleff 1965: 143, 28ff.
 - 11 Thesleff 1965: 142, 23ff.

- 12 Thesleff 1965: 143, 1ff.
 13 Cf. Iambl. *VP* 149; cf. 39, 46; Aristoph. *Eccl.* 446–51.
 14 Thuc. 2.45. Cf. Plut. *Mul. Virt.* 1 = 242ef. Hes. *Theog.* 270. Aesch. *PV* 795.
 15 Plat. *Gorg.* 508a; cf. Archyt. 47B.2, 3 Diels–Kranz.
 16 Thesleff 1965: 151, 20ff.
 17 Thesleff 1965: 152, 1ff.
 18 Thesleff 1965: 152, 9ff. Cf. Musonius in Stob. *Ecl.* 2.123, p. 236 Wachsmuth.
 19 Thesleff 1965: 152, 13ff.
 20 Thesleff 1965: 152, 17–18. On ‘Moderation’: see Waithe 1987: 26–9; ‘Chastity’: see Lefkowitz and Fant 1992: 84; see also Taylor 1965.
 21 Thesleff 1965: 116, 6–7.
 22 Thesleff 1965: 154, 1ff.
 23 Cf. Plut. *Coniug. Praec.* 30 = 142c, 32 = 142d. Lucian *Amores* 42. Juvenal *Sat.* 6. Diod. Sic. 12.21.1
 24 Thesleff 1965: 114, 4ff.
 25 Iambl. *VP* 189–94. Cf. St Ambros. *De Virg.* 1.4, *Patrol Lat.* 16, 203b–205b David, *Proleg.* 11.10 (= p. 33 Busse). Procl. *Comment in Plat. Rep.* p. 420 Basil; cf. vol. I. 248 Kroll. Aristot. *Pol.* 1.13.1260a30. Soph. *Ajax* 293.

Self-help, self-knowledge: in search of the patient in Hippocratic gynaecology

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In medical history recently, there has been a trend towards looking at medicine ‘from the patient’s point of view’.¹ Instead of taking at face value the claims of medical practitioners, one looks at the full range of types of medicine available to a patient, the factors influencing the choice of healer and the patient’s construction of what is happening to him or her – why me? why this illness? how is this therapy supposed to help me?

This type of history is far from simple. Sometimes records exist giving the patient’s point of view – for example, diaries showing the progress of an illness and the reasons for choices of healers² – but, more often than not, the historian of the ancient and medieval worlds in particular has to work obliquely, reusing the canonical texts but addressing new questions to them.

In this paper I want to examine the extent to which such a history may be possible for the Hippocratic gynaecological texts, and perhaps for other ancient texts on women and medicine. These seem most unpromising sources for history from the patient’s point of view; the Hippocratic texts, for example, were written by anonymous men from the fifth century BC onwards, and include advice on medical etiquette, aphorisms to guide medical practice, case histories and lists of recipes, as well as theoretical discussions of health and disease. The patient is clearly object, not subject, here. I will be arguing, however, that, even within the work of male practitioners who construct women’s bodies, create a language for women’s experiences and order the patient how to behave if she wishes to recover, opportunities are imagined to exist for the woman patient to become an active agent. These opportunities centre on the woman patient’s assumed ‘knowledge’ of her own body – a knowledge which is not merely permitted in, but taken as central to, male constructs.