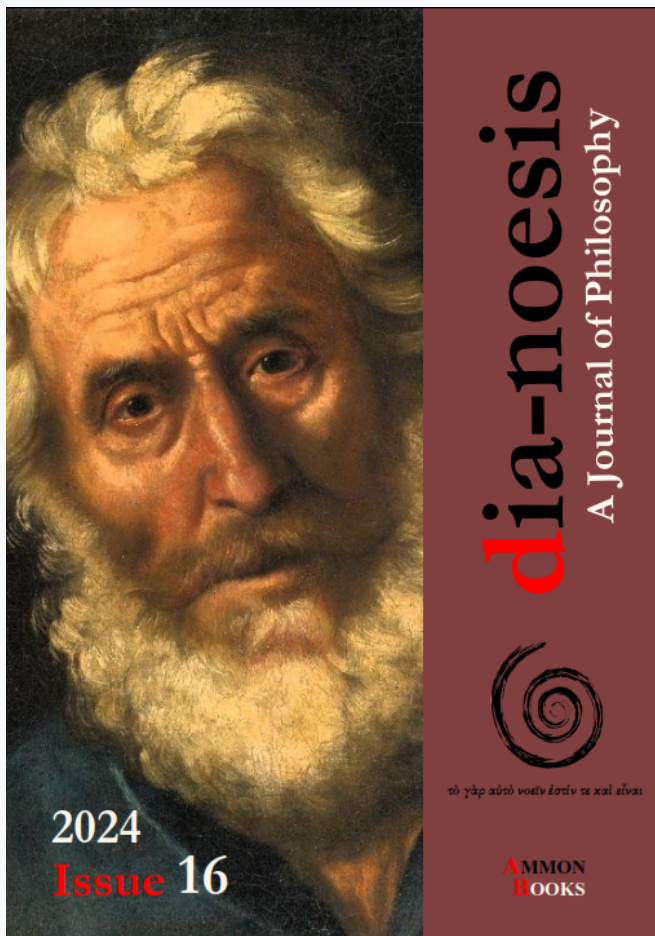


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Alexios Petrou

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Pythagorean Philosophy and Theurgy on Friendship

Alexios A. Petrou,
Professor, University of Nicosia
petrou.a@unic.ac.cy

Abstract

In the Pythagorean tradition, friendship is elevated beyond a mere human relationship, serving as a means to transcend human frailty and attain immortality. This philosophy posits that humans are imprisoned and require liberation through the benevolence of the gods. The Pythagorean way of life is seen as a path to achieving immortality and freedom, where friendship with the gods is the highest form of association. The spiritual practice of theurgy is essential in this process, enabling humans to purify themselves and receive the gift of friendship from the gods. The Pythagoreans distinguished between various forms of friendship, including the highest and most noble understanding between gods and humans, which requires faith, knowledge, philosophy, and theurgy. True friendship is characterized by trust, piety, and scientific worship, and its pursuit necessitates the avoidance of jealousy and conflict, as well as careful judgment and reverence. Additionally, purification, self-control, and a healthy diet are crucial in the pursuit of wisdom and friendship. Ultimately, the Pythagorean philosophy on friendship offers a profound understanding of human relationships, emphasizing the importance of spiritual growth, self-transcendence, and the pursuit of wisdom, leading to the cultivation of true and lasting friendships that bring about wholeness, reconciliation, and harmony.

Keywords: Pythagoras, Iamblichus, Theurgy, Friendship, Education, Purification

According to a sacred oration human beings by nature are herd animals; they are under custody --prisoners-- and it is difficult for them to free themselves or escape. Plato seems to know this: reminding Cebes of the Pythagorean theory of Philolaus, he asserts that human beings are possessions of the gods; they are guarded by them.¹ But for what reason are they imprisoned? Indeed, is there a way to gain their freedom?

Diogenes Laertius tells us that when Hieronymus descended to Hades, he saw Hesiodus' soul bound upon a brazen column and heard it squeak, and also saw Homer's soul hanging from a tree guarded by snakes, because they dared speak against the gods.² For Homer the human being is corporeal: there is no immortal human soul. A similar view of the corporeality of the human will later be held by Epicharmus,³ Herodotus, Pindarus⁴ and the tragedians⁵: it is *hybris* to even consider that a mortal may become immortal.⁶ Greek tradition creates a chasm between the human being and the gods; they are in perpetual discord.

On the other hand, the Pythagoreans held an opposing conviction. In the last two lines of the *Golden Verses*⁷ the poet says:

Then, if you leave the body behind
and go to the free *aither*,
you will be immortal,
an undying god, no longer mortal.

¹ Plato (*Phdr.* 61d and 62b).

² Diogenes Laertius (8, 21).

³ Epicharmus (*CGF*, fr.20.2): *A mortal should think mortal thoughts, not immortal thoughts.*

⁴ Pindarus (I, 5, 14-6): *Do not seek to become Zeus; you have everything, if a share of these fine things comes to you. Mortal aims befit mortal men* and P, 3, 61-2: *Oh! my soul do not aspire to eternal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible...*

⁵ Sophocles, OCT (*Tr.* 473): *Since I see that you think as mortals should think and not without good judgment...*

⁶ On the subject of *hybris*, see Bremer 65-98.

⁷ Thom 98-9, verses 70-1.

The Neoplatonic Hierocles, commenting, maintains that the purpose of life is to free ourselves from the evils of material life and ascend to the isles of the Blessed in the sphere of the gods.⁸ Ascention, confirms twice Empedocles,⁹ is accomplished beyond corporeality in the free *aither*, wherein one becomes an imperishable god. Iamblichus adds that the philosophic way of life is the path for mortals to attain immortality and freedom.¹⁰ In order to accomplish such a great task it is imperative to transcend the Delphic injunctions: “nothing in excess” («μηδέν άγαν») and “everything in moderation” («πάν μέτρον άριστον»). This does not imply a distancing of the philosophical subject from the Oracle of Apollo, rather one has to become in a way irreverent («υβριστής»)¹¹ and a demonic dancer of

⁸ One of the most important Pythagorean principles is that of reincarnation. The Pythagoreans are in agreement with the Orphics on this matter. They support the possibility of deification: the harmonization of the human soul with the Universal soul. Also, see Hierocles, *CA*.

Because human life is full of difficulties and comprises a dialectical synthesis of the finite and the infinite, it ought to follow a specified ascending course until it arrives at the level of perfection, that of the Universal soul. And because the duration of the human biological body in most cases is not sufficient for the completion of the process of catharsis, the soul, reincarnates, enters another body in order to complete its mission. On this subject see Anton 11-2. The Pythagorean principle of reincarnation will later be followed by the neoplatonic Plotinus (3.4.2). On this matter see Georgopoulou-Nicolakakou 1991.

⁹ Empedocles (*Epigr.* in D-K, 5 and fragment 112,10). See also Diogenes Laertius (8,62).

Nevertheless, the position of Empedocles differs from that of Pythagoras. According to G. Zuntz, the poet of the purifications supports the view that the human is already immortal in his/her present life. On the contrary, the poet of the *Golden Verses* supports that the philosophical subject --through the purifications ventured in his/her present mortal life and through continuous reincarnations-- has the possibility of becoming immortal in a future life. This view is also held by Hierocles in his comments. See Zuntz 189-91. Compare Thom 226-9.

¹⁰ Iamblichus (*VP* 6.31). Compare Aristotle (*Fr.* 192).

Much later, Fr. Nietzsche in his own way repeats the same position in the *Twilight of the Idols*: “To live alone one must be an animal or a god – says Aristotle. There is yet a third case: one must be both – a philosopher”. In Nietzsche 1988, KSA 6:59.

¹¹ Hybris, is defined through the Heraclitean meanings of want («χρησιμοσύνη») and satiety («κόρος») (D-K, fr. 65). It is the natural law

Dionysus.¹² Interestingly, according to an anonymous Samian poet, Pythagoras himself was considered to be the son of Apollo.¹³ Abaris the Hyperborean will go even further, in Pythagoras he recognized the god himself.¹⁴

The philosophers possess divine characteristics that transcend human attributes. Their wisdom is divine beyond the spheres of the human mind,¹⁵ which due to its limited nature cannot rise to the supreme apprehension of totality.¹⁶ Most importantly, divine wisdom is given through the benevolence of the gods themselves; it cannot be attained by human effort nor can it be seen or understood by a finite

that defines the limits of personal assertions, without however posing any ethical or social limitations on the code of behavior, since such confines are neither perfect nor eternal. The Pythagorean approach does not constitute a traditional metaphysical interpretation of human existence. The fact that the natural laws are eternal according to the Pythagoreans, leads humans to the necessary way of friendship and philosophy. However, this path of the philosophical way of life does not refer to an ethical Ego which turns its back to nature. On the contrary, the Pythagorean way is beyond ethics and possesses the freedom of movement from the closed world of a personal Ego to that of Nature.

Nietzsche, in the first of *Five prologues on five unwritten books*, which bears the title *On the Pathos of Truth --Über das Pathos der Wahrheit-1872--* (Breazeal 61-6 and KSA 1:755-60), deals with the innate feeling of human *self-love* and supports the necessity of this *unique* emotion for both humans themselves as well as for humanity as a whole. According to the philosopher, this feeling of the *mysterious contradiction* between being and becoming disappears at the moment of *supreme perfection* and thus the perspective of an eternally present human being is fulfilled in the best possible way [Breazeal 61-2, KSA 1:755-56. See the relevant comment in the *Nachlass* of the same period, KSA 7:433 (19, 43)]. However, such a supreme existence is not supported by any metaphysical or social code, except by the dreadful loneliness of its own Ego in search for Being and in the process of contemplating the eternal game of the gods: the destruction and creation of the cosmos. Of course, this form of contemplation does not constitute a metaphysical or social code. Furthermore, through a divine existence one may transcend loneliness and indeed become a friend of the gods. Even more, through philosophy one may shed human mortality and become a god.

¹² On this subject, see Padel 130-44.

¹³ Iamblichus (*VP* 2.5).

¹⁴ Iamblichus (*VP* 19.92).

¹⁵ Iamblichus (*VP* 23.103).

¹⁶ Empedocles *On Nature*, in Sextus Empiricus (*M.* 8,123).

mind. Therefore, it is wise for all who philosophize to call forth such benevolence with all the might of their souls.¹⁷ Divine wisdom can only be approached through the assistance of the gods, who become guides and friends of their chosen ones, engifting them with the ability to perceive the beauty and the greatness of their wisdom.¹⁸

We can approach totality only when we become *friends* of the gods. Having conceived the essence of the Pythagorean inducement, Hölderlin in *Form and Spirit (Gestalt und Geist)* will write that all is *friendship*, and Heidegger translating, will further elucidate that *form and spirit determine each other*¹⁹ without either of them losing its uniqueness. When mortal men receive the gift of coming into intercourse with the gods they are transformed into “noble heroes”²⁰ -- luminous lovers-philosophers-- who have attained the “other” of their Being to become immortal *mortals*.

According to the Pythagorean position, friendship between mortals and gods as well as the accomplishment of the deification of friends results through the process of theurgy. In *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus tells us that the ways of theology (the noetic theory on being) and of philosophy (of perspective dialectics) are on their own insufficient; they have to be complemented by *ineffable works*²¹ through which the gods purify the friends and transform them into lesser deities.

This conviction regarding human nature, which clearly discerns the ability of experiencing the divine despite human weakness, becomes catalytic through friendship. So the human being, which belongs to the heard, even though incapable of comprehending his/her own self on account of weakness and ignorance, through faith in the “other” --which

¹⁷ Iamblichus (VP 1.1).

¹⁸ Nietzsche in the *Philosopher* defines this condition as the *teleology of philosophical genius* and as the perspective of *transcendence*. KSA 7: 420 (19, 16).

¹⁹ Heidegger 5:46.

²⁰ Thom 94-5, verse 2.

²¹ Iamblichus (*Myst.* 2.11.21): *For the perfect efficacy of ineffable works, which are divinely performed in a way surpassing all intelligence.* Compare with Smith 74-86.

is justified through concealment and ineffability-- receives the gift of friendship and is thus freed from the bonds of incarceration and the identity of Ego; from a passive prisoner he/she becomes an active element and driving force. In this divine order of friendship phenomena are revealed in their entirety and the totality of existence is unconcealed.

The friendship of the gods leads Pythagoras in the arms of Apollo, wherefrom the philosopher --*demon* and godly man²²-- returns to the world of opposites and change, to teach the chosen ones --his *fellow-hearers*-- a new and more universal world, regulated and organized in accordance with godly wisdom. Pythagoras' undertaking is founded upon the transcendence of an ethically determined meaning of friendship. Moreover, the philosopher gains the friendship of the gods through a direct understanding that the concealed existence of totality precedes any fixed concept attributed to common forms of friendship. While friendship with the gods entails the continuation of the natural powers of *concealment*. Furthermore, in accord with the divine wisdom of concealment, secrecy is adopted as part of the Pythagorean way of life.

Symbols and *things heard* (*akousmata*) are the ways of friends that the Pythagoreans keep concealed for their sole use. Iamblichus says that to the uninitiated they appear laughable and silly; to friends however they are clearly understood and evident.²³ Plutarchus also confirms that initiation allows friends to excel in virtue whereas the incarcerated and members of the herd are jealous and envious; for this reason, the uninitiated humiliate and upset the philosophers. Plutarchus, drawing from Plato, compares the philosophically ignorant with "puppies, delighting to pull and tear" whoever chances to be in their realm²⁴. Therefore, it is divine wisdom that guided the Pythagoreans to keep their deepest understanding of friendship concealed.

²² Iamblichus (*VP* 6.31).

²³ Iamblichus (*VP* 23.105).

²⁴ Plutarchus (*Moralia*, vol. 1, "Quomodo quis suos in virtute sentiat profectus", 78E-F). Compare Plato (*R.* 539b).

Moreover, for the sake of clarity they discerned between various kinds of friendship. The highest, most noble and secret understanding is between gods and humans, which we have already discussed. Iamblichus speaks of yet another five kinds: friendship of one doctrine for another, friendship of the soul for the body or the reasoning part for the unreasoning, friendship between people (political, national and personal relations), friendship between non-rational animals and, friendship (that is reconciliation) of the opposing powers concealed within the body, that in itself is mortal.

These kinds of friendship emerge through piety and scientific worship, philosophy and theory, through healthy lawfulness, correct physiology, health and the practice of a healthy diet, through unswerving relationships, and through prudence. Hence, faith and knowledge, philosophy and theurgy, intelligence, right opinion, purity of soul and bodily health constitute the prerequisites of Pythagorean friendship.²⁵ In this light, friendship is defined as the deepest flourishing of the cosmic elements, piercing even through Pythagoreanism and organizing intelligence, soul, and material world in accordance to the first imperishable principle, that of the One.

The principle of the One is the highest teaching of universal and cosmic unity through which the Pythagoreans apprehended the organization of nature. Despite the fact that through their secret teachings it may appear that the Pythagoreans give the impression of ethical prejudice, this is not the case. On the contrary, it is more likely that ethical prejudices appear to be based on or result from the deification of the philosophical way of Pythagorean life. Be that as it may, the secrecy of the teachings was not founded upon an elitist outlook but served for the protection of friends. Moreover, in respect to friendship concerning the relationships between people, Pythagoras' inducements refer

²⁵ Iamblichus (*VP* 33.229 and *Protr.* 19,291). See also de Vogel 150-9 and Shaw 118-126.

to the avoidance of jealousy²⁶ and of dispute,²⁷ daughter of Discord («Ἐρις»²⁸).

Hesiodus, referring to «Ἐρις» (Discord) speaks of her two kinds: the first bears the characteristics of detrimental jealousy whilst the second is benevolent and bears the characteristics of the roots of the earth, helping everyone to exert their utmost, to improve his/her livelihood and appreciate the necessity of work.²⁹ Much later Nietzsche³⁰

²⁶ The word used by Iamblichus is *agon*. However, this word has more than one meaning, and therefore, cannot convey the essence that the Syrian wants to emphasize: both jealousy and its opposite, that of benevolent desire for the improvement of one's way of life. For this reason, we make use of the word 'jealousy' in order to convey the meaning indicated.

²⁷ The theme of friendship is the guiding motive of Empedocles' great poem *On Nature* [we follow the edition of Kirk, Raven & Schofield: 341-98, pp. 284-313]. On the surviving fragments of this poem, which are highly reminiscent of Parmenides' poem, the elements of Love («Φιλότης») and of Strife («Νείκος») occupy the dominant position. The first is that constituting the harmonic relation of the four roots, fire, water, earth and air, whilst the second is that which constitutes their in-between dimensions (349, ln.19-20). These two elements, as well as the roots themselves interchange as regards their dominance (349, ln. 27-9, pp.289, 359, p.295, 365, 366, p.299), and this interchange secures universal stability that is conserved by the very nature of the two elements, which run through one another (349, ln.33-5). Regarding the common belief of Pythagoras and Empedocles about the character of the four roots, also see Tzavaras 191-2.

However, the *friendship* that Iamblichus describes here is probably that which Empedocles calls Love (Φιλότης), the unifying element, that is "held fast in the close obscurity of Harmony" (358, ln.6, p. 295) and rejuvenates the mortal generations (360, ln.16-7, p. 296), providing them with equal proportions of mixture, for only in this manner can the human being clearly see and understand the world (392, p. 310).

Obviously, Iamblichus uses the term «φιλία» wrongly, thus implying that which Empedocles terms «Φιλότης». The result of this mix up is to articulate in a confused manner concepts such as «φιλονεικία» and «φιλοτιμία». These concepts, which according to Empedocles have the same meaning and characterize «Νείκος», here are put forth in pairs, either «φιλονεικία-φιλοτιμία» or «φιλονεικία-φιλία», resulting in an "erroneous" translation on the basis of what Iamblichus implied in each case.

²⁸ Hesiodus (*Th.*, 223-32).

²⁹ Hesiodus (*Op.*, 14-24).

reminds us of the latter meaning of «*Épous*». In the fifth preface of the handwritten manuscript *Five Prefaces to Five Unwritten Books*, Nietzsche presented to Cosima Wagner on the Christmas of 1872, *Homer's Contest* (*Homer's Wettkampf*), where the German philosopher brings the second kind of *Épous* to the surface, indirectly expressing his objections on the views of Iamblichus and even more specifically those of the Orphics, indicating the necessity as well as the practical value of the agonistic morality of the ancient Greeks, not only for the Greeks themselves but also for contemporaries.³¹

³⁰ Our insistence in comparing the positions of the German philosopher with those of Pythagoras is not coincidental. E. Rohde, a friend and fellow student of Fr. Nietzsche, wrote an article relevant to the *Pythagorean life* of Iamblichus in *Rheinisches Museum* (Rohde 1871-1872) published by his Professor Friedrich Ritschl. It is notable, that in 1870 Nietzsche had written an article regarding Homer and Hesiodus in the same journal (Nietzsche 1870).

Nietzsche has in mind Rohde's article. In a letter addressed to him, Nietzsche points out that historian J. Burckhardt expressed an interest about his article [Middleton 1996, to Erwin Rohde, after the 21/ 12/ 1871, pp. 84-5; Nietzsche 1986, NSB 3: 257-8].

Notwithstanding, the above --up to a point coincidental-- relation, Nietzsche's philosophy is in essence "Pythagorean". The German philosopher, as he states in the second part of his Prologue in *Ecce Homo*, "is a student of philosopher Dionysus" (KSA 6: 257-258). On the other hand, Pythagoras was a student of Zoroaster, maintains Apuleius in his *Apology* (*Apologia* 31), and during his stay in Arabia together with Porphyrius visited Zaratus the Chaldean, where next to him he was purified from his sins and was taught the ways which human beings ought to maintain in order to keep themselves cleansed (Porphyrius, *VP* 12). For all the references of the ancient writers on the relation between Pythagoras and Zoroaster, see Guthrie: vol. 1, p. 253. From the above, we can infer that the choice of the name "Zarathustra" by Nietzsche was not made by chance.

For the evolutionary path of the theory on the immortality of the soul and the relations of the Orphic and Pythagorean principles with Dionysus Zagreus, see Zeller: vol. I, 1, pp. 53-68, 122-48 and 361-420, and Gomperz: vol. 1, pp. 127-129. Nietzsche knew of Zeller's book. In a letter he addressed to E. Rohde on June 11th 1872 (NSB 4: 9-10), he refers to it and also provides a special citation on Pythagorean philosophy. On the relation of Nietzsche with the Pythagoreans, see Silk & Stern 74 and 218, and Vogel 56, 78-9 and 360-2.

³¹ Kaufmann 1982: 35; KSA 1:787.

Notwithstanding, Pythagoras urges us to refrain from quarrelling and conflict since we ought to know how to give way so as to control temper.³² For his students he instituted punishments --the so-called *πεδαρτάσεις* (suspensions)³³-- whose purpose was the general improvement of the way of life. To be effective one had to recognize their protective and friendly character. And this was accomplished only if they were suffered in good will and in the attitude of reverence. Furthermore, according to the Pythagorean exhortations, friendship ought to be founded upon trust and should never be terminated because of misfortune or disability that may occur in life, save only because of great and incorrigible vice.³⁴ Moreover, one ought to never begrudge those who are not utterly evil and who during a debate or argument maintain good will. On the other hand, if the debate occurs between good and saintly people one ought to express one's difference not with words but with actions.³⁵ Finally, true friendship has to be the result of careful judgment and not chance.³⁶

According to Iamblichus, Pythagoras maintains that friendship is of two kinds: either right (*«εὐκαιρες»* – *on good time*) or wrong (*«ἀκαιρες»* – *out of time*).³⁷ Right friendship is timely and wrong is that which is untimely. The latter kind arises at an inappropriate moment and differentiates two possible friends on the basis of age, status

³² Iamblichus (*VP* 22.101 and 33.230-1).

³³ *«Πεδάρταση»* is the punishment of mid-air suspension from the feet (*πεδ* -foot and *αρτάω* -suspend) [also see Aeschylus (*Pr.* 269)]. We may, therefore, conjecture that the Pythagorean School imposed upon its students severe and exacting punishments. Of course, these punishments were intended for the improvement of the way of life. Compare Diogenes Laertius (8, 20). In this case, reference is made to *«πελαργᾶν»*, which, according to *LSJ*: 1356-7 may be an erroneous form of *«πεδαρτᾶν»*; we consider that it refers to yet another punishment that was imposed to young Pythagoreans, i.e. the punishment of standing on one leg, in the same posture as storks (*«πελαργοί»*).

³⁴ Iamblichus (*VP* 22.102 and 33.232). Compare Iamblichus (*Myst.* 5.9.1).

³⁵ Iamblichus (*VP* 33.232).

³⁶ Iamblichus (*VP* 33.233).

³⁷ Iamblichus (*VP* 30.180).

or rank, kinship and favours done. In the untimely type of association it is absolutely essential to control tempers, threatening dispositions and insolence. From these two kinds of friendship, we may arrive at three conclusions. The first is that the best kind of association between people is the timely. The untimely association, to say the least, is difficult. The second conclusion, that is probably more important than the first, is that friendship between the gods and mortals is untimely. However, it is not untimely in a negative manner. On the contrary, what appears to be untimely is in truth the timeliest friendship. Finally, the third conclusion clarifies that: whereas in human relations the timely and untimely types of friendship act as opposites, in the case of immortal mortals and gods they act as complementary. Likewise, it may be said, that the relations between philosophers, in the Pythagorean meaning of the term, belong to the “untimely timely” type of friendship.³⁸

Since friendship does not only concern human relationships, the opposites of love («φιλότης») and strife («νείκος») cannot define the whole they are merely its parts. It is precisely because of friendship in-itself that these two seemingly opposing forces of life arise. Friendship *in se* precedes and thus defines both forces of love and strife and therefore, it forms the ground through which they arise. However, friendship arising through the intercourse of human beings with the gods brings forth wholeness, reconciliation, harmony, and understanding of the meaning of friendship itself, as well as clarifies the nature and workings of the opposing forces and the hold they bear on human life and action.

The philosophical path of the Pythagorean way of life binds us to friendship, which however, does not only arise through the human power of love and strife because from strife arises friendship only after the extinguishment of the

³⁸ Nietzsche, in the fifth part of the prologue to *Zarathustra* will refer to them as untimely, claiming that true philosophers have never allowed the chord of their lyre to seize playing (KSA 4:19); producing the same penetrating sounds with those produced by the heavenly spheres creating the universal harmonies [Iamblichus (*VP* 15.65)].

fiery anger of soul («ἐκ μὲν νείκους γίγνεται φιλία σβεννυμένου πυρὸς θυμικοῦ»)³⁹. It is imperative to remember that the fundamental pre-condition for the understanding of friendship *in se* is given to the chosen-ones either through the benevolence of the gods or the good predisposition of a certain god, or else through the guidance of a divine demon. Hence, the aim of the Pythagorean way of life is twofold: firstly, it focuses on the purification of the mind and soul, and secondly, it prepares the noble souls to receive the gift of friendship that leads and guides through the long and unending path to wisdom. Iamblichus warns us of the difficulties to be faced: the path is rugged and the wanderer must be very careful. He ought to walk the way in small footsteps.⁴⁰ Nietzsche, will repeat it⁴¹ and elsewhere will also show us the steps; he too will teach us to walk the way to wisdom:

The way to wisdom...

The first step. Respect (discipline and learning) better than anybody else. Collect all things that are worthy of respect and let them clash amongst each other. Carry whichever weight... Community Period.

The second step. Break up the heart that is full of respect if it is tightly bound. The free the spirit. Independence. Period of isolation. Be critical of anything worthy of respect (by idealizing all that is unworthy of respect). Unsuccessful attempt at inverted appraisals.

The third step. Great decision of what matches its rightful position; for recognition. No god and no human hitherto over me! The creator instinct... Give somebody the right to act.⁴²

According to a Pythagorean exhortation, the right of action stems from helping the friend to lift his load and not to lay it down, because “achievements come about as a result of action

³⁹ Iamblichus (*Protr.* 21, symbol 8).

⁴⁰ Iamblichus (*VP* 1.1).

⁴¹ Nietzsche 1985: 5; KSA, 3:17.

⁴² Nietzsche 1901-13: 13:39, 12:121, 14:310, 6:33.

rather than inaction (laziness)”.⁴³ Naturally, the question regarding the way through which Pythagoras achieved friendship arises.

To answer this question we are obliged to examine the educational practice of common listening at the *place of common learning* («ομαχοεῖον») followed by the Pythagorean School. Firstly, let us take a look at the way in which the listeners were selected: Pythagoras did not readily accept all those who wished to become his students, but he tested and appraised them by observing their comportment in the presence of their parents and other relatives, scrutinizing their uncalled for laughter, their silence and unjustified talkativeness, the nature of their desires, their friends as well as their behavior towards them, the way in which they passed their day, he even scrutinized what caused them joy and what sadness. In addition, he examined their whole appearance, their gait and physique, and drew conclusions as to the hidden virtues of their soul. For the initiated even the physical characteristics of the candidates constitute obvious signs.⁴⁴

Those who passed successfully the “physiognomic” test⁴⁵ were accepted in the Pythagorean School, the first five years as *akousmatics* (listeners only). During this period the philosopher scrutinized the steadfastness as well as the authenticity of their friendship (love) for learning and also their disdain for honors. In turn, as “learners” («μαθηματικοί») they participated in the regular lessons and where taught the essential part of the sciences.⁴⁶

However, as previously mentioned, the most fundamental aspect of learning was not the acquisition of knowledge *per se* but the *catharsis* (purification) of the mind and soul. Pythagoras considered that the lessons as well as the educational exercises ought to be faced with magnanimity and courage. He also made statutes for various forms of trial and punishment. In addition, he strongly urged his students

⁴³ Iamblichus (VP 18.84). Compare Iamblichus (*Protr.* 21).

⁴⁴ Iamblichus (VP 17.71).

⁴⁵ Iamblichus (VP 17.74).

⁴⁶ Iamblichus (VP 17.72).

to abstain from eating anything animate and other food that inhibits alertness and correct judgment. The companions over a number of years exercised in discreetness and absolute silence, so as to be able to control their words, and to remain acute in their incessant study for the deep understanding of obscure theorems.⁴⁷ For the same reasons, he advised abstinence from wine, a plain diet, restricted sleep, as well as indifference towards glory and wealth. Towards one's elders he advised sincere respect, towards one's peer's true comradeship in the way of life, kindness and amiability. Finally, towards those younger he advised to maintain a stance of spontaneous support and stimulation, without envy.⁴⁸

The first form of education was music. Pythagoras made use of certain melodies and rhythms in order to restore the powers of the soul to their harmonious and original state; he devised methods of quelling and curing the ills of the body and soul; in an ingenious way he also composed musical pieces so as to reverse with ease the irrational passions of the soul.⁴⁹ Pythagoras was considered the inventor and lawmaker of his School of learning. The philosopher as well as his students believed that he was the only one directly instructed by the nature of the universal harmony to easily perceive and understand the cosmic sounds, which owing to his natural inclination was capable to 'perfectly' reproduce. Since in earnest others were unable to apprehend the pure and clear archetypes,⁵⁰ he considered that only he was worthy to teach and that his students in order to reap the benefits and return to the correct way of life should desire to learn and be educated from the images and examples that he imparted.

From the moment Pythagoras conceived the teaching of cosmic sound and universal harmony, he recapitulated it under the name of *friendship*, which neither exists when the soul is blinded by anger, sorrow or lust, nor when the soul is distorted by ignorance, the most unholy and destructive of

⁴⁷ Iamblichus (VP 16.68).

⁴⁸ Iamblichus (VP 16.69).

⁴⁹ Iamblichus (VP 15.64).

⁵⁰ Iamblichus (VP 15.66).

desires. The philosopher was said to have cleaned and cured the soul of all the above ills, because he lived what he knew and taught: that when one is inspired by the right teacher, and receives the appropriate teaching and aids, in the right time his/her soul is correctly re-arranged so as to receive the gift of inner sight that sees the truth of all beings.⁵¹

The true sight and the pure soul direct the human being to philosophy and theurgy, which brings forth eternal friendship and augments divine love («φιλίαν ἀδιάλυτον ἐγείρει και τόν θεῖον ἔρωτα συναύξει»).⁵² Pythagoras, this very labourer of friendship,⁵³ is the first to name himself a philosopher.⁵⁴ He is a *divine demon* («θεῖος δαίμων»), in love with wisdom, and according to Hierocles, a human-god who apperceives the absolute beauty and through the right use of mind and the benevolence of the gods he loves and philosophizes.⁵⁵

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⁵¹ Iamblichus (*VP* 16.70).

⁵² Iamblichus (*Myster.* 5.26.35).

⁵³ Diogenes Laertius (8,16).

⁵⁴ Iamblichus (*VP* 12.58). Compare Diogenes Laertius (Preface, 12).

Hegel, commenting, supports the view that “philosophy” is not love for the attainment of wisdom, which is an unfulfilled desire; philosophy is not something that can be acquired. And “philosopher” is the one whose relation to wisdom is esoteric (not to be made into an object). His relationship is contemplative, without any insinuation that it is lacking in practical importance. See Hegel: vol. 1, pp. 199-200.

⁵⁵ According to Nicomachus Gerasenus, Philolaus supported that the number that coincides with love, friendship, wisdom, thought («ἔρωτα και φιλίαν και μῆτιν και ἐπίνοιαν») is number 8 [Iamblichus (*in Nic.*17.74)] the number of musical ratios and the cosmic system. Compare Plato (*Smp.* 203e-211d). On this subject, see Georgopoulou–Nicolakakou 1989: 75-105.

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