

OF EUPHORBUS, PYTHAGORAS' PRIOR
INCARNATION

The earliest piece of evidence on Pythagoras, a fragment from a poem of his contemporary, Xenophanes,¹ adverts to the philosopher's teaching of the transmigration of the soul with an anecdote about his recognition of a dog as the rebirth of a friend of his. Famous equally was the claim that he made of himself that he was the Phrygian hero, Euphorbus, who fought in the Trojan War and fell to the spear of Menelaus—a claim which he is said to have substantiated by identifying Euphorbus' shield, which Menelaus had dedicated to Apollo.²

Notwithstanding the fact that the testimonia on the latter is late, the story has been accepted as authentic by nearly all writers and commentators on Pythagoras. It is also free of any derogatory intent that the former may have,³ which would hold one back from taking it's evidence at face value. Even so, the Euphorbus anecdote deserves independent discussion, which would sort out the points of disagreement

¹ Frg. 7 = D.L. viii.36.

² Diod. x.6. 1-3; Sch. V on P 28; Max. Tyr. Dissert. 16.2; Porph. V.P. 26-27; Iambli. V.P. 63; Philostr. V. Apol. 1.1.1 and 8.7.4; Her. Pont. fr. 89 W. = D.L. viii.; Tatian Gr. 25; Hor. Odes 1.28.10; Ov. Met. xv. 160 f.; Hygin. Fab. 112; Lact. Inst. iii. 18.15; Call. fr. 83a; Luc. Gal. 20.3.

³ Few (like Kern and Rathmann) have doubts about the reference being to Pythagoras; no one I know, about its being ridicule. Xenophanes was a notorious satirist of beliefs to which he was hostile. Again, H.S. Long (A Study of the Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Greece from Pythagoras to Plato, Princeton, (1948) p. 17) points out that the other five poetic passages quoted by Diogenes with this one all ridicule Pythagoras. That Xenophanes satirized others need not imply that he satirized Pythagoras; on the contrary (cont.)

in the several testimonia, evaluate their evidence and collate the information they yield about the distinctive teaching of transmigration attributed in tradition to Pythagoras. It will be seen that the details of the episode are not all given by all our sources, nor all in the same way, even if the basic account has been sufficiently consistent, and insistent, for writers to have accepted it without demur. The incident they narrate is itself interesting, and while in keeping with a whole heap of anecdotes narrated about the remarkable man, which have contributed to the image and reputation he held in antiquity, also provides, with one or two other similar notices, a concrete instance supportive of his theoretical teaching of the rebirth of the soul.

Claims of this nature in Greek religion are few and far between, and that too, for the most part inspired by Pythagoreanism. For instance, Pythagoras himself is said to have induced recollection of their past births in many of those who met him,⁴ but we have as a specific instance only the case of Mullias of Croton, whom he reminded his having been Midas, the son of Gordias, and instructed to perform certain rites at his grave.⁵ Epimeides, the sage, claimed he was in a former existence Aeacus,⁶ and perhaps Stesichorus

the first verse of his poem, quoted by Diogenes to identify it, seems to suggest partiality rather than hostility. Long's contention is also hypothetical. Assuming the incident was true, how else could Xenophanes have told it?

⁴ V.P. 65: ἐναργέστατα καὶ σαφῶς ἀνεμύνηκε τῶν ἐντυχοντιῶν πολλοὺς τοῦ προτέρου βίου. Iamblichus (loc cit.) suggests that this care for others through reminding them of their former life began with his recollection of his own past lives.

⁵ This is first given by Aristotle; see Diels Vors. I. p. 99= frg. 191 Rose; see also Ael. iv.17; Iambl. V.P. 145; Nicomachus apud Porph. V.P. 26= Iambl. V.P. 63.

⁶ Vors. 3A1 = Diog. Laert. i.114. Epimeides (frntd.)

the poet, that his soul was the soul of Homer,⁷ equulating whom, it may be, the Roman Ennius made the same claim,⁸ having been addressed by Homer in a 'Pythagorean dream', in which Homer himself recalled that he had reincarnated as a peacock. Later we hear of Pataikos, a writer who said that his soul was no other than that of the great fabulist, Aesop. Some of these claims in Greece are mock-serious when they are made, and could well be parody of the doctrine of transmigration, as when the cock in Lucian says his master Micyllus was an Indian ant and Homer a Bactrian camel in Trojan times,¹⁰ while he himself is none than Pythagoras,¹¹ making the astonished Micyllus whoop:

claimed to have been born several times. There is no question here of psychic excursions; see E.R. Dodds. The Greeks and the Irrational Berkeley and L.A. (1951) p. 164, n.52.

⁷ Anth. Pal. 7.75. This epigram on Stesichorus by Antiparos of Sidon says: "In whose breast, in accordance with the doctrine of Pythagoras, the soul which was once Homer's found a second home".

⁸ Liber 1. See O. Skutch The Annals of Q. Ennius Oxford (1985) p. 70 for the fragments, and p. 147 f. for the commentary. H. Fuchs Mus. Helv. vol. XII (1955) p. 201 f. thinks Ennius was imitating Stesichorus. See however O. Skutch 'Notes on Metempsychosis' in his Studia Enneana London (1968) p. 155. n.20.

⁹ According to the 3rd cent. peripatetic philosopher Hermippus apud Plut. Solon 6.7.

¹⁰ The Cock 16-17.

¹¹ ibid. 4. Passeratus quotes an epigram of Ausonius in which 'Pythagoras of Euphorbus (fame)' is asked what Marcus, recently dead, will become, when he is reborn; to which Pythagoras, learning that he was a libertine and a crook, replies:

"Not bull nor mule, nor horse-camel's his fate;
Nor goat nor ram, but a beetle fond of dung."

"Wonder of wonders, a cock philosopher! But tell me, O son of Mnesarchus, how you became a bird from being a man, and a Tanager from being a Samian."¹²

On the other hand, though not specific of his past lives, Empedocles is quite serious when he says he has already been "a boy, a girl, a bush, a bird, and a voiceless sea-fish"¹³

The Euphorbus claim of Pythagoras is not only made in earnest, it is specific enough to have raised quite a discussion among scholars, not the least part of which bears on the 'choice' of this particular hero for the role. Of equal interest must be the nature of the memory by which he recovered the fact, and the exploit with the shield by which he demonstrated the truth of this - though I have not seen anything like a comprehensive discussion of either in the light of recent parapsychological studies into claimed recoveries of past-birth experiences.

The earliest reference to Pythagoras' claim to have been Euphorbus comes in conjunction with three other lives in the evidence of Heracleides of Pontus, fourth century philosopher and writer, who was a pupil of Plato before he followed the teachings of Aristotle.¹⁴ Diogenes Laertius cites him as follows in his Life of Pythagoras:

¹² loc.cit.

¹³ Frg. 117.

¹⁴ Frg. 89 Wehrli. Heracleides was interested in the occult, and was rather imaginative. Diogenes (v.86) says he heard the Pythagoreans - but this may be an inference. Timaeus is given by Diogenes (viii.70) as having called him a 'narrator of impossible things (παραδοξόλογος); Cicero De Nat. Deo. 1. 1334 says he "stuffed his books with puerile tales" and Plutarch (Cam. xxii) says he was "addicted to myths and fictitious stories" (μυθώδη καὶ πλασματικὰ ὄντια).

"Heracleides of Pontus says that this man (Pythagoras) said this about himself: that he was once Aethalides and was considered the son of Hermes, and that Hermes bid him choose whatever he wished except immortality; that he chose to have remembrance, both in life and in death, of his experiences; that during life he remembered everything, and when he died he preserved the same memory. Later he became Euphorbus and was wounded by Menelaus; and Euphorbus said that he was once Aethalides and that he received the gift from Hermes, together with the transmigration of the soul, and how his soul transmigrated and into how many plants and creatures it had come, and all that it underwent in Hades, and all that other souls had to endure. When Euphorbus died, his soul went over to Hermotimus, and he, likewise, wishing to authenticate the story, returned to the temple of Apollo at Branchidae, where he identified the shield which Menelaus, on his voyage home from Troy, had dedicated to Apollo (so he said), the shield being so rotten through and through that all that was left of it was the ivory facing. When Hermotimus died he became Pyrrhus, a fisherman of Delos, and again he remembered everything - how he was first Aethalides, then Euphorbus, then Hermotimus and then Pyrrhus. And when Pyrrhus died, he became Pythagoras and remembered all the facts mentioned."

Writing on Aethalides, the Scholiast on Apollonius Rhodius¹⁵ says that the dead are said to receive forgetfulness of their experiences in life; but not so Aethalides. This man, (Apollonius) says, even in death did not fall into forgetfulness, and undergoing metempsychosis in accordance with the account given by the philosophers, knew who he was by the will of Hermes. The Scholiast adds that

15 637e

Pherecydes¹⁶ asserts that Aethalides received as a gift from Hermes that his soul be at one time in Hades, and at another in the places above the earth, (ποτέ μὲν ἐν Ἅϊδου, ποτέ δὲ ἐν τοῖς ὑπὲρ τὴν γῆν τόποις εἶναι),

Hermes, as 'conductor of souls' (Ψυχοπομπός) not only leads the souls of the dead to Hades, but on occasion, as during the festival of the Anthesteria, brings them up to earth - perhaps what he is depicted doing in the painting on the Jena lekythos. But clearly there was no implication of metempsychosis in this, even as a privilege restricted to Aethalides, which we find in the notice of Pherecydes concerning him here.

Whoever misrepresented the tradition in order to coopt Aethalides into the prior incarnations of Pythagoras (and it may well be some Pythagorean) has, it will be seen, done so in both significant details. When talking of Aethalides, he renders the gift of Hermes as a retention of the memory of his experiences, both upon the earth and in Hades (ζῶντα καὶ τελευτῶντα), thus seeking to link him with Pythagoras through the latter's reputed power of retrocognition already evidenced by Empedocles with admiration amounting to awe. But again, when he has Euphorbus talking of having been Aethalides, Aethalides has not only received from Hermes 'the gift'- meaning the retention of memory of all that he had experienced in life and in death - but also the 'wandering of the soul' (τῆς ψυχῆς περιπόλησις), now have construed as transmigration and accounting for his rebirth as Euphorus and the others thereafter. Quite obviously Heracleides (or his unknown source) is making a second and more subtle

¹⁶ 3 frg. 109 J. It appears that the Pythagoreans had adopted Aethalides in their list of Pythagoras prior incarnation - which the scholiast now gives as Euphorbus, then Pyrrhus the Cretan, then a certain Eleian whose name is not known, and after these, Pythagoras (cf. 14.8 Diels-Krang).

¹⁷ Frg. 129.

misinterpretation of the legend known to Pherecydes, and for the sole purpose of enlisting Aethalides more firmly into the prior incarnations of Pythagoras.

Hermotimus qualifies for inclusion from a somewhat different consideration. He was reputed to have had the singular ability of leaving his body for long periods of time and returning to it from such psychic excursions with much mantic lore and knowledge of the future.¹⁸ The etymology of his name (it means 'honoured by Hermes': Ερμῆς + τιμῶν) also lends itself conveniently to this, as was evident to someone, who then sought to make it more specific by altering it to Hemodorus (doron = 'gift') recalling thereby the way¹⁹ in which Hermes had honoured him when he was Aethalides. In like manner this account seeks to link Hermotimus with Euphorbus by transferring to him the story, which was in the best tradition told of Pythagoras himself, of the recognition of the shield of Euphorbus which Menelaus, on his return from Troy, had²⁰ dedicated to Juno. The otherwise unknown fisherman, Pyrrhus,²⁰ is perhaps thrown in to complete the intervals (his date being open) of roughly 216 years between the reincarnations of Pythagoras' soul in accordance with a dogma

¹⁸ Apollon. Mirab. 3; Pliny N.H. vii. 174; Plut. De Gen.Soc. 22. p. 592c; Procl. In Rep. ii, 113, 24 Kroll; Luc. Enc.Musc. 7; Tert. An. 2; 44 etc. On one such occasion his enemies are said to have set fire to his body (with the connivance of his wife). Cp. the Brahmin in the Panchatantra tr. A.W. Ryder, Bombay (1949) p. 150-155.

¹⁹ In Plut. loc.cit.; also Procl. loc.cit. Rohde (Psyche transl. from 8th ed. by W.B. Hillis, London (1925) p. 331. n. 112) construes this as a 'copyist's error' - in which case it is surely a very interesting one.

²⁰ See the sequence of lives in n. 16 above. Pyrrhus is made to replace Hermotimus, while the Delian in him has given rise to an anonymous and unknown Elian!

known to Aristoxenus,²¹ and perhaps also to allay suspicion about the rest by his very insignificance and anonymity, while each incarnation is strung to the preceding ones and to certain others as plants and animals and in-between sojourns in Hades by means of a 'relinking consciousness', which had originated as that gift made by Hermes to Aethalides.

The whole thing smacks of being a consummate fiction which builds upon the Euphorbus anecdote with other material of an accommodating nature in accordance with a mystical mathématique that the soul of Pythagoras underwent incarnation every 216 years. The treatment of birth-recollection is also peculiar. Firstly it is viewed as a singular power restricted to Pythagoras (notwithstanding the possible implication the other souls too reincarnated, when it is said that Euphorbus saw "what other souls too underwent in Hades"). Secondly, it is described as something which accompanied Pythagoras with every incarnation of his - a sort of concomitant of his reincarnation rather than a potentiality belonging to the supernormal state (jhāna) which he had attained, and which anyone else too may acquire, who achieves that same mental and spiritual excellence. As we saw, Heracleides simply traced it back to the gift Hermes once gave Aethalides, and for no other reason than that he was his son.

Dicaearchus is associated with Clearchus²² in giving a somewhat different account of the incarnations of

²¹ Theolog. Arithm. p. 40 Ast. = Aristoxenus frg. 12 Wehrli. In this Aristoxenus is associated with the Pythagoreans Androcydes and Euboulides, and with Hippobotus and Neantes. A written work (γράφῃ) cited by Diogenes (viii.14) makes Pythagoras himself declare that he rose from Hades to be reborn among men every 207 years. This is undoubtedly a late pseudo-Pythagorean document.

²² Gell. 4.11.14 = Dicaearchus frg. 36 Wehrli.

Pythagoras, though it is noteworthy that he retains Euphorbus - Pythagoras was first Euphorbus, then Pyrandrus, then Aethalides, then a beautiful harlot named Alco. As Wehrli observes,²³ Pyrandrus is a variant of Pyrrhus, our Delian fisherman. Aethalides is bad in chronology - Apollonius places him among the Argonauts and in the generation which preceded the Trojan War and to which belonged the fathers of those who fought in it. The substitution of Alco for Hemotimus, considering her sex and profession, seems inspired by malice (or parody) rather than, as in the case of Empedocles' claimed incarnation as a girl, intended²⁴ to exhaust the categories of lives the soul could assume,²⁴ or some such purpose.

It is noteworthy how the kind of thing begun in Heracleides' account has already begun to transform his own story, presaging the interesting history it was to have. Alco in Dicaearchus and Clearchus reappears as the courtesan Aspasia in Lucian's excellent satire of Pythagorean metempsychosis, The Cock,²⁵ while the cock itself (who claims to be Pythagoras reborn) is surely a degradation of the peacock, which had found its way into the line of Pythagoras' reincarnations.²⁶

²³ 'Die Schule des Aristoteles'. Heft I Dicaearchus Stuttgart (1944) p. 33. Rohde (op.cit. appendix x. p. 599) thinks this is a parody of Heracleides, which is not very likely in the case of Clearchus but suits Dicaearchus very well.

²⁴ A careful look at this fragment will show that the lives Empedocles claims to have lived represent animal, fish, bird and plant, creatures of land, sea, and air, and (in boy and girl) the two sexes.

²⁵ 19.

²⁶ He says Hemotimus 'returned' (ἐπανήλθεν) to the temple of Apollo at Branchidae and pointed out "the shield which Menelaus dedicated" (ἦν Μενέλαος ἀνέθηκεν ἀσπίδα). This, presumably by way of proving that he was Euphorbus. (This reverses the version that (Pythagoras) (contd.)

The authenticity of the Euphorbus incarnation as against the rest depends, not only on the fact that it appears to have served as the basic instance upon which the rest (if they were invented) were invented, but also on the fact that, while being included in every such list of incarnations, it is narrated or alluded to by several ancient writers, to the exclusion of others. On the other hand, hardly any of these other reputed incarnations is treated exclusively as an incarnation of Pythagoras like this one in our sources.

Heracleides leaves us in some doubt as to whose the shield really was which Menelaus dedicated to Apollo Branchidae on his return from Troy - 'Euphorbus' or his own.²⁷ It is not difficult in the context to suppose that it was his own, even if Heraclitus (Euphorbus reborn) identified it, since it was perhaps the last thing Euphorbus had before his eyes when he fell dead in Troy, so that it would have impressed itself in his mind indelibly at that crucial moment. Homer tells us Euphorbus struck Menelaus on his round shield; but the bronze did not break through; the point was bent back by the stout shield. Then Menelaus brought his own spear into action with a prayer to Zeus. As Euphorbus fell back, he struck him in the base of his throat, and following up the thrust with his full weight, killed the Trojan hero. The sight of the same shield, which was

recollected being Euphorbus upon seeing the shield!) The question is (a) how the dead Euphorbus knew that the shield was dedicated at Branchidae (b) and how pointing to the shield (if he did not pick it out of others), would have established he was Euphorbus - unless other people were unaware of the identity of the shield, and he went further to demonstrate that it was the shield by some special knowledge he had about it. Or does 'return' mean he had accidentally spotted his shield in the temple, and now returned to point it to others - which would again by itself hardly constitute proof that he was Euphorbus.

27 Interesting for comparison is the story told of the Irish hero, Finn-nac-Coul, that he was reborn after two hundred years as Mongan, king of Ulster, and recalled the incident in that earlier birth, of the killing of (contd.)

instrumental for his death now hanging from the temple wall would thus have factitiously evoked Hermotimus' memory of that former existence and the incident of his death at the hands of the Argive king.

Sources which are more specific, however, make it clear that the shield was Euphorbus' own, and that Pythagoras (as Pythagoras, not Hermotimus) recognized it because he was none other than the one-time owner of it. Legitimately imaging upon Homer, Ovid improves upon Diodorus' account, making Pythagoras declare that he used to carry it on his left arm when he was Euphorbus.²⁸

Coupling the case with Pythagoras' general doctrine of reincarnation, the same poet implies that the philosopher cited his individual experience by way of substantiation of the truth of the latter.²⁹

"Our souls are immortal and are ever received into new bodies, where they live and dwell, when they have left their previous abode. I myself at the time of the Trojan War - for I remember it well - was Panthous' son, Euphorbus, who once received full in the breast (sic) the heavy spear of Menelaus, Atreus' younger son....."

Pythagoras is said to have evoked this memory of his past life in the temple itself where the shield was hung up (as Ovid also makes him say), but it is hardly likely that he would have bragged about it in a public harrangue of the sort Ovid imagines for him, or flaunted it as proof of the fact of rebirth. Iamblichus however brings Pythagoras' recollection into line with his having reminded others of their past lives

Fothad Airgdech, a king of Ireland, by Cailte. The two hundred year gap and the incident recalled should ring a bell, even if the man killed was not the recollector himself.

²⁸ xv. 163: Cognovi clipeum, laevae gestamina nostrae.

²⁹ xv. 158-162.

but without implication that he sought to prove anything by his own, except the fact that he had been Euphorbus. For instance it is recorded by Aristotle himself that Pythagoras reminded Mullias of Croton that he had once been Midas, the son of Gordias. If Iamblichus connects the Euphorbus-feat with anything, it is (through the implication of rebirth) Pythagoras' admonition to others to lead a life of virtue, and his own remarkable power of birth recollection evidenced by Empedocles.

Heracleides suggests Hermotimus (sic) made the claim elsewhere and went to Branchidae with the deliberate purpose of authenticating it through the shield. Iamblichus does not explain the nature of the 'incontrovertible proof' (ἀναμφίλεκτα τεκμήρια) with which Pythagoras demonstrated that he was Euphorbus.³⁰ He passes over the story as too well known to be narrated. This must be what Nicomachus had meant when he originally bypassed the story as being δημώδη, ³¹ not as Burkert translates, because he found it 'silly'. The writer who tells us how Pythagoras established the truth of his claim to have been Euphorbus of the Trojan War is Diodorus Siculus.³²

According to Diodorus Pythagoras wept when he saw the shield. And when the bystanders asked him why he did so, he answered that he himself had carried that shield in the land of Troy when he was Euphorbus. Incredulous, they thought him mad. Whereupon he replied that he would give convincing

³⁰ V.P. 65..... παρίεμεν ὡς πανὸ δημώδη. Iamblichus is, in doing likewise, following Porphyry (see V.P. 26).

³¹ Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism, transl. E.L. Minar Jr., Cambr. Mass. (1972) p. 141, n. 109.

³² x.6.1. Followed by Tertullian (Anim. 28.4), who says that he not only recognized the shield but said it was his from marks unknown to the people.

evidence that what he said was so. For, on the inner side of the shield had been inscribed 'Of Euphorbus' (Εὐφώρβου). At this surprising answer all said to take down the shield, and on the inner side in fact was found the inscription.

No other writer gives the nature of the proof Pythagoras offered to any doubting Thomas who was present at the time, but if he did substantiate his claim, it is some such thing that he would have done. The incident is thus in a way brought in line with a number of remarkable feats attributed to Pythagoras, some of which we have from Aristotle himself.³³ Notable among these is his appearance in two places at the same hour of the same day; that he drew a white eagle to him in Croton and stroked it; that he foresaw that a ship putting into harbour at Metapontum would have on it a dead body; that he gave the exact number of fish there were in a net being hauled ashore; that he correctly predicted the appearance of a white bear in Caulonia, and so on. In respect of the doctrine of transmigration of course it joins his recognition of the dog as an erstwhile human friend of his, and of Mullias as having been once Midas, the Phrygian king - both incidents that are fairly well authenticated.

Interesting as the demonstration of the truth of his claim is, there is reason to doubt that Pythagoras was disbelieved and needed to do so. The shield of Euphorbus would have been known then, as it was known in Pausanias' day, without the need to rediscover it for his fellows in the way Diodorus tells us he did. Nor is there any evidence that he convinced them by picking it out of a number of other shields.³⁴ The drift of the anecdote is not the wonder he

³³ See Diels *Vors.* I. p. 98-99 = frg. 191 Rose. Others are given by other sources. For a list of these *mirabilia*, see Burkert *op.cit.* p. 141 f. He adds (n.113) "It is scarcely to be supposed that Aristotle failed to mention the Euphorbus story, but since it was so well known he is not cited for it."

³⁴ No ancient writer says Pythagoras proved his assertion by picking out the right shield from among others, as is carelessly stated by H.E. Gould and J.L. (contd.)

caused by the identification of the shield but by the identification of himself with the owner of that shield. (His weeping too adds a gratuitous touch of drama - why should he weep for Euphorbus when that man was doing pretty well as Pythagoras?) It is not surprising, however, that the tradition has sought to improve on the story and bring it in line with the wondrous other stories narrated of Pythagoras.

Brief as the original Euphorbus anecdote is, then, it has still one or two details on which the authorities differ. According to the earliest of them, Heracleides, the temple at which the shield had been dedicated by Menelaus and where Pythagoras, as Hermotimus, indicated it, was that of Apollo at Branchidae. Branchidae, also called Didyma, was eleven miles south-east of Miletus and not far out of Menelaus' route to Argos from Troy. Tertullian says Delphi,³⁵ which must be a mistake or corruption. The more likely, however, is the tradition in Diodorus, Ovid Lamblichus etc. that the temple was the temple of Hera in Argos.³⁶ This is the Heraeum near Mycenae, according to Nicomachus.³⁶ Pausanias, describing the Heraeum, evidences the existence of the shield even in his own day, which is as much as twelve centuries after it was dedicated by Menelaus and, seven centuries after it was reidentified by Pythagoras³⁷ - even though Heracleides gave us to understand that well before Pythagoras day it had rotted through and through, leaving only the ivory facing - (διασσηπιῶν ἤδη, μόνον δὲ διαμένειν τὸ ἐλεφάντινον πρόσωπον). Pausanias writes:

Whitelay; see their edition of Q. Horatius Flaccus Odes. Book I, New York (1966) p. 124, n. to ode 28, vs.10.

³⁵ loc.cit. How did Maximus Tyrius (loc.cit.) get the idea that it was a temple of Athena?

³⁶ apud Porph. V.P. 27; Iambl. V.P. 63.

³⁷ ii. 17.3. On the Heraeum, see J.G. Frazer ed. Pausanias's Description of Greece vol. III London (1913) p. 163 f. comment 17.1 ad loc.

"In the foretemple are ancient images of the Graces on the left, and on the right is a couch of Hera, and a votive offering consisting of a shield, which Menelaus once took from Euphorbus at Ilium."

When Menelaus killed Euphorbus, we are told he stripped him of his armour.

Ἀτρείδης Μενέλαος, ἐπεὶ κτάνε, τευχ' εὔουλα. 38

It is, however, not obvious that he managed to carry them away, and soon afterwards it is not even clear whether the arms being referred to by Homer are those of Euphorbus or Patroclus. However, Menelaus must have succeeded in taking the armour away for the *ἄνθρωπος* tradition to have existed from antiquity that the shield was dedicated at a temple by him and for a shield to have been accepted as such in Pythagoras' day and in Pausanias' day, to say the least.

Pausanias had no reason to doubt that the shield he saw in the Heraeum was Euphorbus', even if he saw no need to reiterate the story of Pythagoras' recognition of it (so also Hyginus in his *Fables*), perhaps because, like Nicomachus and Iamblichus, he thought it already trite. Surely, it cannot be that he did not know the story, or that such anecdotes were out of keeping with his commentaries.

While Pythagoras' other incarnations have been considered spurious, in the sense that they are introductions by later writers, beginning (to our knowledge) with Heraclides of Pontus, the Christian apologists, taking the claim of Pythagoras to have been Euphorbus as one that he himself had put forward, attacked its credibility both on the grounds of the general doctrine of reincarnation as well as on its own internal inconsistency. Tertullian in no uncertain terms calls Pythagoras a liar, asking to what extent the man would not go to get at the mark on the shield, who

38. Il. xvii. 60. Apollo, disguised as Mentès, sent Hector to thwart him (70-71). See Frazer *op.cit.* p. 183 comment. 17.3; see also Kekulé 'Euphorbus' *Th. Mus. N.F.* vol. XLIII (1888) p. 481-485. In the ensuing conflict, it is not immediately clear whose arms are involved, Euphorbus' or Patroclus'.

had severely impaired his health by hiding for seven years in an underground chamber, only to reappear later and thus seek to prove the truth of rebirth.³⁹ What if Pythagoras found the information about the mark in some more secret accounts? What if he had heard the breath of a rumour which had outlived a lost tradition? What if he knew of it from a secret inspection of the shield, which he had gained by bribing a sacristan in that temple? Tertullian even suggests that Pythagoras may have gained knowledge of it, like the Magi, through katabolic agencies, familiars and Pythonic spirits; for was not Pherecydes, his guru, prophesying by arts such as these? What if the same demon was in Pythagoras also, who in Euphorbus made him wage such bloody deeds? Finally, Tertullian argues, why is it that the man, who had proved he was Euphorbus by the evidence of the shield, not able to recognize in a similar way any of the fellow Trojans who had fought alongside him? For, if the living came from the dead, they too would have been living again at the time.⁴⁰

Adopting another line of attack, Tertullian asks how you can recognize Pythagoras as Euphorbus, when Euphorbus' soul was soldierly and warlike (militarem et bellicam), as even the fact of the dedication of the shield shows, whereas Pythagoras shunned the battles of Greece for the peaceful pursuit of geometry, astrology and music, in Italy - matters so alien to the disposition of Euphorbus.⁴¹

³⁹ Anim. 28.2. The source of the story is Hermippus (apud.D.L. viii.41) and is obviously a malicious invention based on the Salmoxis story in Herodotus (iv. 93-94), taken together with evidence of a katabasis to Hades by Pythagoras and the legend of his previous incarnations. See also Schol. on Electra 62. The confusion is clear that Pythagoras tried to prove rebirth by katabasis, whereas the two are quite different things. Ritter rightly protested (Notae Conradi Rittershusii in Malchum sive Porphyrium Lipsae (1816) p. 241 n. ad.loc. Πρώτον μὲν Εὐφορβός).

⁴⁰ Anim. 28. 4-5.

⁴¹ Anim. 31. 3-4.

Lactantius likewise calls Pythagoras a silly old man who lied that he was Euphorbus in a former life, alleging that he may have done so because he was of ignoble stock and in this way hoped to adopt for himself a family from the Homeric poems.⁴²

But why Euphorbus? asks Rohde. After all, he was not such a prominent or distinguished hero; even the credit for killing Patroclus went more to Hector than to him.⁴³ Rohde remarks the fact that Euphorbus' father, Panthous, was a priest of Apollo; but notwithstanding Pythagoras' distinctive association with god - we are told that the Crotoniates deemed him to be an avatar of the Hyperborean Apollo⁴⁴ - Rohde is not convinced that the explanation is to be found here.⁴⁵

Delatte read 'Euphorbus' (Εὐ + φόρβη, from φερβεῖν) to mean "he who feeds well" i.e. 'the good shepherd', and assumed the existence of a Phrygian cult of a 'good shepherd' and an Orphic apocalypse derived from it.⁴⁶ But, as Burkert underlines it,⁴⁷ this is pure hypothesis. Burkert himself finds 'more persuasive' the interpretation of Karl Kerényi, who saw a clue to the riddle of Pythagoras' identification with this otherwise not very distinguished participant in the Trojan War in the words of the dying Patroclus in Homer.⁴⁸

⁴² Inst. 3.18.15.

⁴³ op.cit. See Il. xvii. 80-81: Apollo, disguised as Mentès, calls Euphorbus "the best man of the Trojans" (Τρίων τὸν ἀρίστον) - but this is merely rhetorical cliché.

⁴⁴ op.cit. append. x, p. 599; see Aristot. loc.cit.

⁴⁵ loc. cit.

⁴⁶ La Vie de Pythagore de Diogène Laërce, Brussels (1922)

p.157⁴⁷ op.cit. p. 140. n. 111.

⁴⁸ op.cit. p. 140; Karl Kerényi p. 19.

Patroclus, stunned and disarmed by a blow from Apollo's hand, struck in the back by Euphorbus' spear and finally finished off by Hector with a spear-thrust in the belly as he attempted to leave the battle-field, reviles Hector with his dying breath with being only the third of those who participated in his death.

ἀλλὰ με μοῖρ' ὀλοή καὶ Λητοῦς ἔκτανεν υἱός,
ἀνδρῶν δ' Εὐφωρβός· σὺ δ' εἰς τρίτος ἐξαναρίζεις.

It was deadly Destiny and Leto's son that killed me;
Of men Euphorbus; you were but the third to cause my death.⁴⁹

Burkert writes:⁵⁰ "If we consider the arithmetic here, it seems as though Moira, Apollo, and Euphorbus only make up two, so that two of the three must be identical. The solution that Moira is not personified here, and thus not counted as one of the group, is by no means self-evident to the ancient scholars who busied themselves with the problem." Thus, Leto's son (Apollo) is, in human form Euphorbus. "If someone wanted to say 'I am perhaps Apollo', he could, in Homeric terms, call himself Euphorbus," says Kerényi.⁵¹ The advantage of this interpretation, observes Burkert,⁵² is that it is entirely derived from the Homeric text. "The name Euphorbus refers unmistakably to Homer, and the whole intellectual world of the archaic period takes its character from Homer. Innovation presents itself in the guise of Homeric interpretation."

Clever, but hardly acceptable, and for the following reasons:

49 Il. xvi. 849-850

50 loc.cit.

51 loc.cit.

52 loc.cit.

- (a) Apollo is as distinctive a participant in the killing of Patroclus as is Euphorbus, whom Homer introduces for the first time with some personal details about him. The two can in no wise be identified with each other in the context; their contributions to the death of Patroclus are, like Hector's, discrete and sequential.
- (b) There is, besides, no less suitable an occasion to identify the god with the hero than in a context in which the god himself, as himself, takes a hand. How Homer would have done such a thing would have been to make Apollo appear in the guise of Euphorbus when Euphorbus himself was nowhere around.
- (c) As Burkert admits, Euphorbus is no distinguished participant in the Trojan War - as indeed he would have been if he went about as Apollo incarnate. Shortly after this Euphorbus is killed; and it is Apollo, who, impersonating Mentès, seeks Hector's help to save his armour.

If Apollo is anything here, he is the divine agency which sets in motion the fulfilment of Patroclus' Moira - and if he is allied with anyone in this capacity, it is Zeus himself. Though only Apollo of the two actually participates in the deed, Patroclus lays the responsibility on both of them for gifting the victory over him to the two heroes, at least to Hector.⁵³ Notwithstanding Pythagoras' absorption with number mysticism, I very much doubt whether he would have chosen Euphorbus to be his prior incarnation upon so dubious a consideration as a possible ambiguity in two verses of Homer.

Despite Burkert's expressed preference for Kerényi's interpretation, he is not averse to two others based on the etymology of Euphorbus' name (-generally it is well, he says, to keep in mind the possibility of multiple interpretations!). One of these is that of Delatte which we saw, though Burkert himself had observed it to be 'pure

⁵³ Il. xvi.844-845: σοὶ γὰρ ἔδωκε νίκην Ζεὺς Κρονίδης
καὶ ὁ Ἀπόλλων, οἱ μὲν ἑδάμασαν.

hypothesis'. The other is that of Otto Skutch, who takes the $\phi\epsilon\rho\beta\epsilon\upsilon\nu$ in the name 'Euphorbus' reflexively (contrary to Delatte) so as to mean one who feeds, not others but himself, and who does so 'well' ($\epsilon\upsilon$), meaning by 'well' not 'abundantly', but 'rightly' - this rightly implying of course the dietary regimen of Pythagoras.⁵⁴ Skutch writes: "I do not know how it could be proved that etymology was responsible; but, having discussed the matter with classical colleagues for more than a dozen years, I still have to find one to whom the explanation, as soon as it is pointed out, does not seem self-evident."⁵⁵

An etymological basis for the selection of Euphorbus as the prior incarnation of Pythagoras (even if this was made by Pythagoras himself) finds indirect support in the etymological adjustment (i.e. to Hermodorus) which the name of Hermotimus undergoes in one tradition in order to cement him more firmly to Aethalides in the series of births given by Heracleides. The two etymologies cited by Skutch in support of the likelihood of an etymological consideration for the selection of Euphorbus are those of 'Mnesarchus', the name of Pythagoras' father, and the name 'Pythagoras' of the philosopher himself. What is astonishing, however, is that the evidence on them, far from demeaning the Euphorbus possibility, gives it a curious new dimension.

Take Mnesarchus. Etymologically this patronymic fits Pythagoras singularly well, says Skutch,⁵⁶ since it means "the man who remembers his origin." If so, as Skutch himself suggests, either the name inspired the story, or was itself inspired by the story, that Pythagoras remembered his origin.

The ability to recollect his and other people's past births is attributed to the Buddha without any suggestion that it was prompted by the name of his father, or anyone

⁵⁴ 'Notes on Metempsychosis' C.Phil. vol. LIV (1959) p. 114 f., republished in Studia Enneana London (1968) p. 151 f.

⁵⁵ Stud. En. p. 151.

⁵⁶ loc. cit.

else. Birth-recollection is found a concomitant in other reincarnation religions as well, not excluding the Irish, with life extended beyond the limits of birth and death - though the capacity to recover such memory is not assumed for everyone but only men of certain eminence or attainment.⁵⁷ We may therefore dismiss as absurd any suggestion that Pythagorean anamnesis was prompted by the name of the philosopher's father - and in the same vein, Pythagorean vegetarianism from the name of Euphorbus. Any etymological dependence must be vice-versa, if not accidental.

Kurt von Fritz is firmly decided on the historicity of the name 'Mnesarchus' as that of Pythagoras' father.⁵⁸ Evidence of it is as early as Heracleitus and Herodotus, and is repeated by several later sources.⁵⁹ The only variant found is 'Mnemarchus', which is late and possibly a scribal error, since the same writer has Mnesarchus elsewhere.⁶⁰ Besides, etymologically it makes hardly any difference.

Skutch says the possibility of an etymological basis for the selection of Euphorbus for Pythagoras' prior incarnation was first alluded to by Corsen, and nobody else seems to

⁵⁷ Tertullian (Anim. 31.5) asks why, out of all Greece (and indeed out of all the people in all the countries, through all ages) only four souls are claimed to have returned; why not he? Lactantius (loc.cit.) is equally indignant at this capacity of Pythagoras, which no others have.

⁵⁸ 'Mnesarchus' RE, vol. XV.2 (1931-1932) 2270. Skutch thinks the matter open to some doubt. Why, he does not say, in the face of the formidable evidence.

⁵⁹ Heracl. frg. 129; Herodot. iv. 95.

⁶⁰ Iambl. V.P. ii. 4; Aristotle loc.cit. Porphyry and Diogenes have Mnesarchus, as also Lucian and the rest.

have considered it.⁶¹ Perhaps not in recent times. But the implications appear to have been satirized in antiquity by Lucian in The Cock. For, when the cock there asks Micyllus if he had heard of a man named Pythagoras, the son of Mnesarchus of Samos, Micyllus replies:

"You mean that sophist, that braggart, who imposed a restriction on the eating of flesh and beans, banishing from the table my favourite food and then went on to persuade people that before he was Pythagoras, he was Well-fed (Euphorbus)?..."⁶²

Tertullian lets the possibility of this sort of frivolity pass for a more serious contention against those who raise the matter of Pythagoras having been Euphorbus. "Look at Euphorbus," he says; "his soul was warlike and aggressive; Pythagoras, on the other hand, was so quiet and pacific that he avoided the wars then raging in Greece and preferred to devote himself to a life of geometry, astrology and music, so alien to the interests and disposition of Euphorbus."⁶³

The name 'Pythagoras' itself, Skutch points out, was interpreted in antiquity, in terms of allegorical philology popular among the Orphics and Pythagoreans, as the 'mouth piece of Apollo'.⁶⁴ In this case, however, no one can even suggest that it was his service that in due course gave rise to his name; he was known as Pythagoras from the start. To think the converse is even more irresponsible; one Pythagoras

⁶¹ 'Der Abaris des Heracleides Ponticus' Rh. Mus. vol. LXVII. (1912) p. 22.

⁶² 4 = § 708. Some readings have "and went on to persuade people that they must not talk for five years," whereupon it is the cock that says, "Know this thing too, that before I was Pythagoras, I was Euphorbus". Micyllus' opinion of Pythagoras was that he was bogus and an imposter. The cock admitting this new point would only justify Micyllus. It is best said by Micyllus himself.

⁶³ Anim. 31.4.

⁶⁴ loc.cit. See Janbl. V.P. 1.1: ἐπὶ δὲ τῆ τοῦ θεοῦ Πυθαγόρου δικτύως ἐπωνύμῳ νομιζομένη πολὺ δήπου μάλλον ἀρμόττει τοῦτο ποιεῖν.

became a sculptor, another an athlete with even the reputation of having introduced meat-eating among sportsmen.

If we go by the occurrence of these two names, then, the conclusion is inevitable that the name 'Euphorbus' too was a happy accident - that is, unless one is prepared to be mystical and believe that we have here a symbolic nomenclature attendant upon the birth of a supernatural personage. A parallel in such a case could be found in the names associated with Gautama, the Buddha; at birth he was called 'Siddhartha' that is, 'he who achieves his goal'; his mother was 'Mahamaya', which translates 'Great Illusion', while the etymology of his father's name, 'Suddhodhana', curiously approximates to 'Euphorbus,' meaning he who partakes of pure food'.⁶⁵ Otherwise, the very unexceptional nature of the hero Euphorbus speaks in favour of the sincerity of Pythagoras' claim to have been that man.⁶⁶

Pythagoras' recollection of having been Euphorbus, with or without allusion to the shield, is told by most sources with no mention of other incarnations, but again without prejudice to the likelihood of other incarnations, both before Euphorbus and between Euphorbus and Pythagoras. As we saw, a few narrate it as a case-instance used by Pythagoras to illustrate the truth of the general doctrine. The

⁶⁵ The name of Pythagoras' mother, when it makes its appearance, is recruited into this nomenclature by a story strongly reminiscent of the nativity of Christ. Preserved by Apollonius in his Life of Pythagoras and repeated by Porphyry (V.P. 2) and Iamblichus (V.P. 2.4-7), it says she was called Parthenis (Virgin?), but her husband, Mesarchus, changed it to Pythais after Pythian Apollo foretold of her giving birth to a remarkable son. The son himself was named Pythagoras, meaning 'prophesied by Apollo'. Iamblichus (2.V.P.2.7-8) is averse to the notice in Epimenides, Eudoxus and Xenocrates that he was actually fathered by Apollo; he thinks rather that the soul of Pythagoras was under the lead (ἡγεμονία) of the god, or in association (συνόπαδος) with him - a true ψυχὴ Ἀπολλωνιακῆ.

⁶⁶ See II. xvii. 80-81. Apollo, disguised as (contd.)

Heracleides account not only extends this single instance with an incarnation prior to Euphorbus, viz. Aethalides, but two others as well between Euphorbus and Pythagoras, viz. Hennotimus and the Delian fisherman, Pyrrhus. But he adds, when talking of Euphorbus having been Aethalides, that he recollected other incarnations as plants and animals. Peter Gorman⁶⁷ pounces on this to suggest that Aethalides was the first human incarnation of Pythagoras' soul, since Euphorbus recollects only plant and animal incarnations previous to this, and concludes that "these previous lives demonstrate an evolution which attained its summit with the incarnation as the wise man Pythagoras." Quite apart from the fact that Gorman is here reading too much into this detail in Heracleides, he is obviously giving undue credence to what most scholars have suspected to be secondary elaboration upon the Euphorbus anecdote, be it by Heracleides himself or his source at one or more removes.

The cock in Lucian, on the other hand, speaks of numerous incarnations since his soul came down from Apollo, but is careful not to interpose any between Euphorbus and Pythagoras, saying that when he died as Euphorbus,⁶⁸ his soul remain unhoused till Mnesarchus built him a house.

Skutch⁶⁹ however argues against the popular implication of the Euphorbus anecdote for a tradition of at least one incarnation between Euphorbus and Pythagoras, which must, by the evidence from which he derives it, be older than the

Mentes, calls Euphorbus 'the best man in Troy' (Τραίων τὸν ἀρι-
στον) when he rallies Hector to oppose Menelaus, who has stripped the hero of his arms - but this is just rhetorical cliché. Apart from his assault on Patroclus, his curriculum is insignificant.

⁶⁷ Pythagoras: A Life London (1979) p. 28.

⁶⁸ 17. Philostratus (viii.14) accepts Pythagoras as the next human incarnation after Euphorbus - but this may be just out of carelessness, if not his own interpretation to fill out the interval between the two.

⁶⁹ op.cit. p. 153-154.

second century B.C. For he thinks that Ennius' claim that his soul came to him from Homer via a peacock is clearly modeled on a descent of Pythagoras' soul from Euphorbus. The time element between Homer and Ennius (which the peacock incarnation splits into two 300 year intervals) is, Skutch finds, the same as that between Euphorbus and Pythagoras, if one assumes for Homer the Herodotean date in the 9th century. As for the peacock, it sits more naturally in the descent of Pythagoras, being the bird of Samos, the home of the philosopher, and so, according to Skutch, must have been imitated into the descent of Ennius from Homer, where, as Tertullian had sneered, it hardly does credit to the poetic lineage.

Skutch finds evidence for the two 300 year intervals into which the peacock incarnation splits the time between Euphorbus and Pythagoras, in Empedocles, who declared that Pythagoras' memory spanned ten and even twenty generations of men. Twenty generations (calculated at 600 years) from Pythagoras takes us to Euphorbus; ten, he says, to the (hypothetical) peacock.

Our concern is with Euphorbus, not the peacock. But if Skutch's hypothesis of a Pythagorean peacock is better than his argument, the bird now common to both the Euphorbus-Pythagoras descent and the Homer-Ennius descent must have had a lot to do with the conflation of the two subsequently. Thus we find Perseus writing:

'Lunai portum, est operae, cognoscite, cives'.(Enn.sat)
cor iubet hoc Enni, postquam destertuit esse
Maeonides, Quintus pavone e Pythagoreo

"Get to know, citizens, the gateway of the Moon -
 its worth your while."

Ennius makes this appeal from his heart,
 when he proclaimed to be

70 Anim. 33-8, Tertullian is right that though the peacock plumes itself with beautiful feathers, it has a loud and raucus voice. It has been compared to the braying of a donkey.

Maeonides, Quintus from the Pythagorean peacock.⁷¹

Commenting on this the scholiast says, "He calls him 'fifth' (Quintus) because of the opinion which declares that the soul of Pythagoras was transferred to a peacock, and from the peacock to Euphorbus; from Euphorbus to Homer; and from Homer to Ennius."⁷² By this reckoning Ennius is fifth alright, but not from the Pythagorean peacock. Besides, the chronology is ridiculous if Pythagoras is to precede Euphorbus and Homer. Lact. Stat. Theb 3. 484 has, first Euphorbus, second Pythagoras, third peacock, fourth Homer and fifth Ennius - but again (as is evident) not fifth from the peacock. Pseudo-Acro (Hor. Odes 1.28.10) is non-committal. He has Pythagoras saying he was Euphorbus before he became himself, then goes on to add: "This man (Pythagoras) is said to have been born before as Homer, afterwards as a peacock, and finally as Ennius."

This alternate succession arising from the sonnia Pythagorea of Ennius emulates, as it rivals, the Heracleidean. But if it is to conform to Perseus, it must obviously begin with the peacock and end with (as 'fifth') Quintus Ennius. Skutch however rejects a numerical pun on this praenomen of Ennius, even though he elsewhere admitted that "etymological speculation likes to fasten on numerals."⁷³ The reason is that, as we saw, he himself had necessarily located the peacock incarnation (in the case of Ennius) between Euphorbus and Pythagoras, with no prospect of lifting it off to first position to allow for the pun on 'Quintus' in Quintus pavone e Pythagoreo.⁷⁴

⁷¹ 6. 9-11.

⁷² Schol Pers. 6.11.

⁷³ op.cit. p. 151.

⁷⁴ John Connington The Satires of Persius Oxford (1874) p. 118, n.11 ad loc says a pun may very well have been intended by Persius - but that then we should have had a rather than ex, as in alter ab illo and a Jove tertius Ajax; on the other hand, if Ennius (Quintus) is the same as (could)

With the philosophers the claim of Pythagoras to have been Euphorbus seems to have particularized the question of identity between incarnations in the general doctrine of metempsychosis. Aristotle had asked of the Pythagorean doctrine how a chance soul could occupy a chance body. Tertullian found Pythagoras' psychological desposition so different from that of Euphorbus. Lucian saw in it cause for humour when the cock in his satire ups and claims he is Pythagoras, while Callimachus imputes with curious effect the geometrical achievements and abstinence from flesh to a Pythagoras, whom he calls Euphorbus.⁷⁵ The climax of all this must be the appalling paradox which Diogenes works out of the instance in an epigram in which he seems to pride himself:

If you wish to know the mind of Pythagoras,
 Look on Euphorbus' shield and its boss.
 For he says "I have lived before." But when he wasn't,
 If he says he was someone, then he was no one when
 he was.⁷⁶

The inclusion of Aethalides in the incarnations of Pythagoras enlists for the philosopher an exceptional power of memory which the former is said to have received as a divine dispensation. Coupled with a similar gift of alternating his life between earth and Hades, the impression created that, like the experience of reincarnation, the power of recollecting was a privilege restricted to Pythagoras. Iamblichus' observation that Pythagoras assisted others to recover the memory of their former births, and the signal case of Mullias of Croton known to Aristotle however show that such birth-recollection was within the power of others

Homer Maeonides, the ex can stand; e.g. Quintus fiam e Sosia
 Plaut. Amph. i.1.152.

⁷⁵ Call. Iambli. 124 f. (=Diod. x.6.1)= Oxyrh. Pap. 1011
 ed. A.S. Hunt.

⁷⁶ viii. 45.

as well. In this connection recent writers draw attention to the Pythagorean practice of memory development. Pythagorean, we are told, will not get up from bed until he has recalled all the happenings of the previous day. By more stringent and advanced exercises they may have been taught to recover memories of the distant past, and with the attainment of supernormal powers, some may even have broken through their intrauterine existence to recollections of past lives. Pythagoras himself, as Empedocles tells us, could, when he 'reached out' (ὀρέξατο) with the full power of his mind (νοησιῦ... προηίδεσσιν) go as far back in time as ten or twenty life-times of men.

Such memory is experiential. Experiential memory, says Jonathan Barnes,⁷⁸ is typically expressed by way of the formula, 'I remember ϕ ing', and the object of such memory is an experience, and an experience of the remembering person.

John Locke's account of personal identity is properly expressed in terms of 'experiential' memory, and amounts, says Barnes, to a conjunction of the following two premises:

- (M1) If a is the same person as b, and b ϕ ed at time t and place p, then a can remember ϕ ing at tp.
- (M2) If a can remember ϕ ing at tp, and b ϕ ed at tp, then a is the same person as b.

(M1) is open to the criticism that a may in fact have been b who ϕ ed at tp, but cannot recollect having ϕ ed at tp. This would be the case with many things a had done as a himself and within the present life itself. But this does not absolve a of responsibility for them, or, as regards identity, deny that it was he who did them. The only thing is that he cannot remember. While this can happen even

⁷⁷ V.P. 165.

⁷⁸ The Presocratic Philosophers revised ed. London (1982) p. 108 f. But see B. Williams Problems of the Self Cambridge. p. 4. He says that since 'remembering doing is remembers himself doing' it is tautologous; also, so far from constituting personal identity, it presupposed it.

within the single life of a (when a is the same person a), due to a simple lapse of memory. The concept of Lethe, (the River of Forgetfulness in Hades, from which all the souls of the dead are made to drink, according to Greek mythology) lends itself symbolically to reincarnation eschatology to account for the total amnesia souls suffer in one birth, of the previous life, or lives. Thus, we find Lactantius sarcastically exclaiming about Pythagoras' recollection of having been Euphorbus (and having then been killed by Menelaus):

"O strange and marvellously singular memory of Pythagoras, and O, the wretched memory of us all, who do not know who we were before! Or perhaps it was brought about through some error or a favour that he alone did not touch the whirlpool of Lethe and never tasted the water of oblivion."⁷⁹

A failure to remember does not disprove the identity of a person within one life or across more than one life, if the reincarnation hypothesis be accepted. (M2), on the other hand, is immediately plausible, says Barnes. "Indeed, if we take the notion of place narrowly, so that at most one person can be at p at any given moment, and if we construe 'remember' in a veridical sense, then (M2) is a necessary truth; if a remembers ϕ ing, then a ϕ ed; and if a ϕ ed and b is the ϕ er, then a is identical with b. And it is (M2) which Pythagoras requires."

Put in this frame, the claim of Pythagoras, as given by Heracleides, is simple and straightforward.

- (1) Pythagoras remembers being killed by Menelaus at Troy at a particular time of a particular day in the course of the Trojan War.
- (2) Euphorbus was killed by Menelaus at that particular time of that particular day in the course of the Trojan War.

⁷⁹ loc.cit.

(3) Pythagoras is identical with Euphorbus.

The argument is valid. But of course its truth depends upon the historicity of Homer's assertion that there was a hero called Euphorbus, who was killed by Menelaus in the circumstances in which the poet says he was killed. But more importantly, whether Pythagoras actually remembered or was hallucinating upon the Homeric allusion, or even deliberately lying.

It is to insulate him against a charge of imagining or lying that the story of the shield (which originally suggested that it merely evoked the reminiscence in him of having been Euphorbus) was extended in the manner known to us from Diodorus. Not that even so the matter can be settled in Pythagoras' favour, as we see from the suspicions raised by Tertullian, when taken together with a certain reputation, which is found early in Heraclitus and Herodotus, that Pythagoras was not beyond resorting to dishonesty - a reputation to which, of course, any personage claiming to esoteric knowledge and superhuman powers would be susceptible.

Even granting Pythagoras' claim to be true, it is not possible to assess the nature and intensity of his power of birth-recollection from the Euphorbus episode alone. Indeed, it is not even possible to decide whether he recollected his life as Euphorbus to an even greater extent, and merely remarked about his death in it (which otherwise Barnes finds 'a touch unusual') upon coming across the shield. Taken per se and restrictedly, however, one may compare the recollection it evidences to the memory of a former habitation such as is in the capacity, in Buddhism, of an ordinary Brother, whose memory of the past is described as 'factitious' in that it is not spontaneous but evoked through certain means. Such a Brother, who is yet to become an arahat, can only acquire memory of past births ⁸⁰ step by step - and then too of one birth or a few, but no more.

80 Visuddhi Magga 411.

His recognition of the reincarnation of his friend as a dog, even though this too is effected factitiously i.e. by the sound of its barking, must speak for an ability on Pythagoras' part to recognize the birth of others as well.⁸¹ He was also able to assist others (as we have seen in Iamblichus' general assertion and the more particular instance of Mullias cited by Aristotle), to recollect their past births, perhaps at least the one previous - though how he set about this is not known, nor whether it was in any way involved with the reputed Pythagorean memory-training.

If, however, one accepts the likelihood that the shield of Euphorbus upon the wall of Juno's temple did not evoke the memory in Pythagoras of his having been Euphorbus, but merely occasioned the observation on that past life, which was accessible to him without the need of such means anyhow, it would put the sage in a different category of beings, at least as recognized by Pali Buddhism. Empedocles, speaking of it as a marvellous ability as it is in Buddhist estimate, says Pythagoras saw "each one of existing things" (his phraseology for 'everything') in ten or even twenty lifetimes of men - and this surely without always having before him evocatives for such memory recoveries.

This Empedoclean description of Pythagorean abhiñña seems more reminiscent(!) of the overknowledge of a Buddha, an iddhi acquired by contemplative discipline, which, when taken together with Pythagoras' ability to see the lives of others, is comparable to the power of birth-recollecting included as one of the six powers of levitation which accompany the achievement of liberation. Memory occurs by

⁸¹ See A.K. Coomaraswamy 'Recollection, Indian and Platonic' JAOS suppl. to no. 3, (issued with vol. LXIV, no. 2) p. 6. Recollection occurs factitiously when those who are naturally forgetful are constrained or stimulated to remember by another person (or thing), as when one remembers a relative by likeness or cattle by their brands.

such overknowledge simply as when monks the like of Ananda, who are reputedly 'birth-rememberers' (jātissara) recall a birth (jatim saranti), using their supernormal faculty. This power, a manifestation of omniscience, is exercised at will by such beings as the Buddha, and extends to recollection of any birth whatever.⁸² It is spontaneous and in the name of intuition (anubhūti). As regards such a category of beings recognized in Pythagoreanism we have to be satisfied with the evidence we have of Pythagoras' unique powers, when taken together with a classification of rational beings, observed by the Pythagoreans, into gods, men and 'beings like Pythagoras.'⁸³

If, then, one considers Pythagoras' birth-recollection in the light of his general doctrine of rebirth, and both these in the context of the several observances and practices arising from them, for which there is evidence - whether such evidence appears to be contradictory, garbled or misunderstood - there is little doubt that Pythagoras presented himself in Greece as a close approximation to the Buddha in India. Notable among these attendant features of the rebirth doctrine are the concept of incarnation as a suffering for the deeds of the soul in prior existences, and the world as a place from which one cannot be too soon in escaping; that liberation from the world and from the cycle of births is into a state of bliss, the path of liberation, contemplation (θεωρία) and a way of life; the acceptance of all beings as equal (ομογενή), whence the abstinence from killing and flesh-eating; and finally, the recognition of a stage of advancement in the path of liberation, in which 'beings like Pythagoras' were thought to possess marvellous

⁸² Coomaraswamy op.cit. p. 5-6. See Digha Nikaya 3.281, based on several other texts; PTS Dictionary s.v. abhiñña.

⁸³ Aristot. loc.cit., τοῦ λογικοῦ ζώου τὸ μὲν ἐστὶ θεός, τὸ δὲ ἄνθρωπος, τὸ δὲ οἷον Πυθαγόρας. It would seem that such beings were, like the arahats of Buddhism, on the threshold of liberation. In which case Pherecydes may also be thought to have been such a person; see Ion frg. 4.

qualities and potentialities, not the least of which was the ability to recollect their own past births, as well as those of others. Wondrous stories were told, and multiplied, of Pythagoras himself (as of the Buddha) which bore on the signs attendant upon him, his ascetic practices (including reticence, meditation, frugality and abstinence), his powers of forevision and prophesy, bilocation and miracle-working, his strange influence over bird and beast - and not the least of these, his remarkable claim to have been born before this, in one of which existences he had been Euphorbus, the son of Panthous, whom Menelaus killed and despoiled on the battle field to Troy.

The question is bound to occur, then, whether there was a borrowing, and if so, by whom from whom, or more broadly, by which civilization from which.⁸⁴ This has been argued in favour of the one by one set of scholars, and in favour of the other by another, and often enough as prejudice dictated. The evidence is largely inferential and malleable. As far as Pythagoras and the Buddha are concerned, they are, for the most part of their lives, contemporary. Written evidence for the belief in reincarnation is, as A.B. Keith observes,⁸⁵ in

⁸⁴ The best case for a Greek borrowing from India was that made by Leopold von Schroeder, Pythagoras und die Inder Leipzig (1884). For the opposite view, see A.B. Keith 'Pythagoras and the Doctrine of Transmigration' JRAS(1909) p. 569-606 (I find his arguments not as good as they appear). Recently C.H. Kahn wrote ('Empedocles among the Shamans' in Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy ed. J.P. Anton with G.L. Kustas, New York (1971) p. 35): "The time has perhaps come to reconsider in the light of modern research and with more rigorous techniques of comparison, the hypothesis developed by von Schroeder in 1884."

⁸⁵ op.cit. passim.

favour of Greece - but this could be because the Indians relied longer on an oral tradition.

I have no wish to enter my views in this controversy here, nor is it necessary to place the Euphorbus episode against the wider backdrop to evaluate it. What the evidence on it does, however, reflect on the issue is that, while both Greece and India can trace the evolution of the concepts surrounding the reincarnation hypothesis in their own civilizations without the need of a hypothesis of borrowing, the doctrine seems not to have enjoyed the consensus in Greece which it did - and indeed does - in India. For, while it has continued in India to be a fundament of Indian religion, thought and life, it has, even in the brief antiquity in which it surfaced among the Greeks, limited itself to certain exclusive religious and philosophical circles, not the least of these the Pythagoreans and the Orphics, who by reason of this very belief, have from the first been subjected to the unsympathetic attentions and even ridicule of others. We have had a fair sampling of this in the case of our Euphorbus anecdote.

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