



Plato and Pythagoreanism

By Phillip Sidney Horky

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Was Plato a Pythagorean? Plato's students and earliest critics thought so, but scholars since the nineteenth century have been more skeptical. With this probing study, Phillip Sidney Horky argues that a specific type of Pythagorean philosophy, called "mathematical" Pythagoreanism, exercised a decisive influence on fundamental aspects of Plato's philosophy. The progenitor of mathematical Pythagoreanism was the infamous Pythagorean heretic and political revolutionary Hippasus of Metapontum, a student of Pythagoras who is credited with experiments in harmonics that led to innovations in mathematics. The innovations of Hippasus and other mathematical Pythagoreans, including Empedocles of Agrigentum, Epicharmus of Syracuse, Philolaus of Croton, and Archytas of Tarentum, presented philosophers like Plato with novel ways to reconcile empirical knowledge with abstract mathematical theories. *Plato and Pythagoreanism* demonstrates how mathematical Pythagoreanism established many of the fundamental philosophical questions Plato dealt with in his central dialogues, including *Cratylus*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Timaeus*, and *Philebus*. In the process, it also illuminates the historical significance of the mathematical Pythagoreans, a group whose influence on the development of philosophical and scientific methods has been obscured since late antiquity. The picture that results is one in which Plato inherits mathematical Pythagorean method only to transform it into a powerful philosophical argument about the essential relationships between the cosmos and the human being.

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Review

"Plato and Pythagoreanism is a fascinating, intelligent, and effective book... Horky provides a learned new account of mathematical Pythagoreanism and detects some of its traces in Platonic passages without succumbing to circularity. By applying novel approaches to an old question, Horky has provided scholarship with a very remarkable contribution." --*Journal of the History of Philosophy*

"This is an inspiring book, widening the view on the Pythagoreans and their concept of number. The material is perfectly organized." -Volker Peckhaus, *Zentralblatt MATH*

"This impressive work is crucial reading for students of early Pythagoreanism... Essential." --*Choice*

"Plato and Pythagoreanism is a most interesting study, from which I learned a good deal and derived much pleasure. Horky sets out here to investigate the nature and extent of the influence on Plato and the Academy of that tradition within early Pythagoreanism which may be termed 'mathematical.' Despite the sketchy nature of the evidence, Horky proves his argument sufficiently to make this an important contribution to scholarship."--John Dillon, Trinity College Dublin

"Horky's wide-ranging and meticulously researched *Plato and Pythagoreanism* provides an important contribution to our understanding of the doxographical traditions and the ongoing dialectic between the Greek philosophers of the fifth and fourth century BCE by engaging with some of the lesser known -- but no less interesting -- 'mathematical Pythagoreans' and systematically presenting their transformative influence on Plato's philosophy. This book deserves close attention from any student in ancient philosophy."--Mariska Leunissen, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

"Philip S. Horky's *Plato and Pythagoreanism* is both deeply insightful and actually pleasant to read ... it is a great success." -- *Archai Journal: On the Origins of Western Thought*

About the Author

Phillip Sidney Horky is Lecturer in Classics at Durham University.

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