

Aristoxenus of Tarentum: the *Pythagorean Precepts* (*How to Live a Pythagorean Life*)

An Edition of and Commentary on the Fragments
with an Introduction

The *Pythagorean Precepts* by Aristotle's pupil, Aristoxenus of Tarentum, present the principles of the Pythagorean way of life that Plato praised in the *Republic*. They are our best guide to what it meant to be a Pythagorean in the time of Plato and Aristotle. The *Precepts* have been neglected in modern scholarship, and this is the first full edition and translation of and commentary on all the surviving fragments. The introduction provides an accessible overview of the ethical system of the *Precepts* and their place not only in the Pythagorean tradition but also in the history of Greek ethics as a whole. The Pythagoreans thought that human beings were by nature insolent and excessive and that they could only be saved from themselves if they followed a strictly structured way of life. The *Precepts* govern every aspect of life: e.g., procreation, abortion, child-rearing, friendship, religion, desire and even diet.

CARL A. HUFFMAN is Research Professor and Emeritus Professor of Classical Studies at DePauw University. He is author of *Archytas of Tarentum: Pythagorean, Philosopher, and Mathematician King* (2005) and *Philolaus of Croton: Pythagorean and Presocratic* (1993), and editor of *A History of Pythagoreanism* (2015), all published by Cambridge University Press. He is author of the articles on Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism for the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and is one of the leading authorities in the world on ancient Pythagoreanism. He has been awarded fellowships by The Howard Foundation, The National Endowment for the Humanities, and The John Simon Guggenheim Foundation. He also received a fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies, which he held while a Visitor at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey.

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with an Introduction

CARL A. HUFFMAN

*Emeritus Professor and Research Professor of Classics
DePauw University*



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Preface

Since the only detailed studies of Aristoxenus' *Pythagorean Precepts* ever completed are two German dissertations written in Latin early in the twentieth century (see Chapter 8), little apology seems necessary for presenting the scholarly world with a full study of them here. Indeed, the *Pythagorean Precepts* are particularly important in light of scholarship on Pythagoras in the last fifty years, which has generally recognized, following Burkert's epoch-making study (1972), that Pythagoras was not the great mathematician and scientist that he became in later antiquity and was, instead, most important as a founder of a way of life. In Plato's only mention of Pythagoras, Socrates identifies him as especially beloved as a leader in education and goes on to remark that his followers still stood out among others for a way of life they called Pythagorean (*Resp.* 600a–b). Thus, when writing the *Republic* a hundred years after the death of Pythagoras, Plato knew of Pythagoreans of the late fifth or early fourth century who lived a distinctive Pythagorean life. It is precisely these Pythagoreans who were Aristoxenus' teachers and associates when he came from Tarentum to the Greek mainland in the middle of the fourth century before he joined Aristotle's Lyceum. In the *Pythagorean Precepts* Aristoxenus presents the principles that governed the way of life of his Pythagorean friends, the Pythagoreans whom Plato found so remarkable in the *Republic*.

Different readers will want to make use of this volume in different ways. The hardy specialist in ancient Pythagoreanism should read it through from cover to cover. The reader who wants to find out the nature of this Pythagorean way of life without getting into the scholarly details should read Chapters 1 and 2 in order to get a brief idea of the nature of the evidence for the *Precepts*, then go immediately to the reconstructed text of the *Pythagorean Precepts* in Chapter 11 and read through that text in English and finally turn to Chapter 10 for a discussion of the ethical system of the *Precepts*. The reader who wants an overview of previous scholarship on the *Precepts* and a critical discussion of what has been the standard interpretation of them should then see Chapters 8 and 9. Those wanting to delve further into the

problems encountered in reconstructing the text should read Chapters 3–6.

The bulk of the volume is taken up with the detailed commentary on the individual fragments that is the basis for the more general discussion in the Introduction. In that commentary I have several goals. First, in each case I have provided a discussion of the evidence that the fragment in question does derive from the *Pythagorean Precepts* and to what extent, if any, it has been altered in transmission. These questions of authenticity are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 but are treated in more detail in the commentaries on individual fragments. Second, I have provided close examination of the language of the fragments to see to what extent that language is representative of the fourth-century Greek of Aristoxenus' time and to what extent it has been influenced by Platonic and Aristotelian ideas as well as the much later Greek of authors such as Iamblichus. This study reveals that the language is overwhelmingly that of Aristoxenus' time, with little specific Platonic or Aristotelian influence, but with some admixture of later language added in transmission by Iamblichus or others. Third, I have tried to elucidate the meaning of each fragment and evaluate its contribution to the Pythagorean tradition and the Greek philosophical tradition as a whole. In carrying out the research on the language of the fragments I relied heavily on that wonderful research tool, the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, and would like to thank the Project Director, Maria Pantelia, for her invaluable help.

I have been working on this book for over ten years and it would not have been possible to complete it without generous grants from a series of sources. First I would like to thank my home institution, DePauw University, for awarding me a Janet Risi Faculty Fellowship for 2005–8 and a University Professorship in 2009–13 both of which gave me released time for work on the project. The National Endowment for the Humanities allowed me to get the project off to a good start with a fellowship in 2002–3. In 2008–9 I received a fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies, which allowed me to complete later stages of the work. During part of the tenure of the ACLS Fellowship I was a visitor at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, and benefited greatly from the wonderful scholarly atmosphere there, which was particularly fostered by Heinrich von Staden. Numerous scholars have helped me with my project, but I owe a particular debt to Myles

Burnyeat and Charles Kahn. My wife, Professor Martha Rainbolt, has read the entire manuscript and has saved me from many errors as well as providing loving encouragement. I could not have completed this project without her support. I would like to thank Michael Sharp, Mary Bongiovi and Gillian Cloke at Cambridge University Press for all their hard work in making this book possible. I dedicate this book to my mentor and friend Alex Mourelatos.

Abbreviations

- CAG 1882–1909. *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*. Berlin: Reimer.
- DG Diels, H. 1879. *Doxographi Graeci*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- DK Diels, H. 1951. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. 6th edn. W. Kranz. Berlin: Weidmann.
- FGrHist Jacoby, F. 1923–. *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. Berlin: Weidmann; Leiden: Brill.
- FHSG Fortenbaugh, W., Huby, P., Sharples, R., and Gutas, D. (eds.) 1992, repr. with corrections 1993. *Theophrastus of Eresus: Sources for His Life, Writings, Thought and Influence*. Leiden: Brill.
- LSJ Liddell, H. G. and Scott, R. 1968. *A Greek–English Lexicon*, revised by H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie. Oxford: Clarendon.
- OCD Hornblower, S., Spawforth, A. and Eidinow, E. (eds.) 2012. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. 4th edn. Oxford University Press.
- SEP Zalta, Edward N. (ed.) *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://plato.stanford.edu/>
- TLG Pantelia, M. (ed.) 1972–. *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*. <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu>
- W Wehrli, F. 1967. *Die Schule des Aristoteles: Texte und Kommentar*. vol. 2. *Aristoxenus*². Basel: Schwabe.