‘KABBALAH’ IN ANCIENT GREECE

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‘Kabbalah’ in the title of this talk is in inverted commas because it is not my purpose to illuminate Kabbalah at all; if there is any indirect light to be shed by the fact that I shall be talking about what are almost certainly some of the roots of Kabbalah, that is up to you to work on later, if you want to. I’m only going to be using a couple of aspects of Kabbalah as a kick-off point to illuminate Pythagoreanism. Essentially, what I want to show is that Pythagorean research is astonishingly similar to the type of research you might associate with Kabbalists. It is not identical, though: I’m not going to try to present the two systems as identical, which is always a worthless exercise, whatever the systems being compared. I’m using Kabbalah only so that we move from the more familiar to the less familiar, from a living tradition to a dead one, to try to understand the dead one.

I’m going to assume that none of you know anything about ancient Pythagoreanism. Probably some of you do, but equally probably more of you think you do. The truth, however unpalatable, is that very little is known to lay readers about Pythagoreanism. In the first place, our information is scanty: the first six hundred years or so of the 1000-year tradition are represented only by fragments and others’ reports. In the second place, that information is more accurately preserved by academic scholars than fringe writers on Western mysticism, and few people bother to read the scholars. In the third place, even when we do have substantial Pythagorean texts, in the early centuries of this era, there are only a few texts, but few even of these few have been translated, and even fewer have been translated accurately. So how can you expect to know about ancient Pythagoreanism? That is why I shall assume, as a working hypothesis, that none of you know anything about it.

The only qualification on this is that if you do manage to get hold of reliable translations of the works of later Pythagoreans, you <u>can</u> often assume that they are saying pretty much the same as their predecessors would have said hundreds of years before them. The few early fragments of people like Philolaus of Croton, or the numerological speculations of people like Plato, or the reports even of unsympathetic people like Aristotle, afford us glimpses of work which is not substantially different from the more extended extant texts of people like Theon of Smyrna, Nicomachus of Gerasa, or the anonymous compiler of *The Theology of Arithmetic*.

Pythagoras lived in the sixth century B.C. He was born on the island of Samos in the eastern Mediterranean, but moved for political reasons to Croton in south Italy, where he established communities of his followers. He was an initiator in four, or actually three areas. First, he and his immediate successors made a misguided attempt to establish ideal political systems throughout the city-states of southern Italy. That is not the function of the work: they were overthrown and massacred.

Second he introduced or at least gave impetus to the doctrine of reincarnation in the West, and designed a whole moral and practical teaching to purify the soul and break out of the wheel of incarnations. Interesting though this side of his work may be, I’m only going to be talking about Pythagorean <u>theory</u>, so I mention this practical side to their work only to prevent my giving the impression that theory was all they got up to. Third, he provided the chief impetus in the West for the development of the exoteric science of mathematics. Fourth,

he started a tradition of number-mysticism or arithmology, some aspects of which are what I shall be talking about.

It is these last two areas which are, or were originally, actually the same. I mention this by way of a preface to Pythagoreanism not only for its own interest, but also because it can provide some insight into the underlying union between the esoteric and the exoteric, and into the working of the law 'As above, so below.'

It is an accurate generalization to say that the ancient Greek philosophers were impressed by the orderliness of the universe. The word kosmos originally means 'order' or 'adornment'. The Pythagoreans simply attributed this orderliness to the presence of number in the universe. It is not just that anything and everything is countable and that therefore number is arguably responsible for order, since to be able to count something, it has to be limited, definite and ordered. It is also that the orderliness spoke to the Greeks of the operation of some divine Intelligence. The Pythagoreans were therefore saying that God used number to order the universe. This is from Nicomachus of Gerasa:

> We have often said before that the creative Mind wrought the construction and composition of the universe and everything in the universe by reference to the likeness and similarity of number, as if to a perfect paradigm. But since the whole was an indefinite multitude and the whole substance of number was inexhaustible, it was not reasonable or scientific to employ an incomprehensible paradigm, and there was a need of commensurability, so that the Creator God, in his craftsmanship, might prevail over and overcome the terms and measures which were set before him, and might neither contract in an inferior fashion nor expand in a discordant fashion to a lesser or greater result than what was appropriate. However, a natural equilibration and commensurability and wholeness existed above all in the decad ... Hence it was reasonable for God to use it as a measure for things and as a gnomon and straight-edge when he added things to one another and fitted them together harmoniously. And this is why, both in general and in particular, things from heaven to Earth are found to have been organized by the decad.

It followed, for the Pythagoreans, that doing mathematics was a way of trying to understand how God manifests in the world and of bringing oneself closer to God, of making oneself more like God. Thus the exoteric science is simultaneously the esoteric science. The Pythagoreans would never have lightly counted their change or the number of apples in their fruit bowl! As Aristoxenus reported in the late fourth century B.C., 'Their life is ordered with a view to following God, and it is the governing principle of their philosophy.'

Of course, there are differences between mathematics and arithmology. Arithmology is not concerned with demonstration or any of the other complexities of mathematics; its chief concerns are the properties of numbers, what particular numbers mean. In pursuit of this meaning, arithmology may draw on the axioms, conclusions and terminology of mathematics, but little more. And since the Pythagorean arithmologists, as Aristotle complained, only counted up to ten, then their arithmology is concerned only with the first ten numbers, and other numbers only in so far as they relate to the first ten numbers. This restriction is due to the fact that after 9, 10 simply starts a fresh sequence of numbers. They used a race-course image for several aspects of their work: this recycling of the first decad was often likened to a race-course or stadium:

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

1 10

18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11

Numbers progress from 1 to 9, and then restart at 10: 10 and 1 are the turning-posts in an infinite race. You will have noticed, as the Pythagoreans did, that 10 is composed of 1+0, which equals 1; 11 of 1+1, which equals 2; and so on.

So you could say that the core of Pythagorean arithmology was an exploration of the meaning of the first ten numbers, their place in God's creation, and how they reveal God's providence for the world.

Before getting down to some nitty-gritty, let me finally point out, what is probably obvious, that arithmology is by no means silly, though it has often been dismissed as superstitious mumbo-jumbo. Mathematical symbolism is the most abstract language known to mankind; this is why scientists have to use it. The time is foreseeable, to take one extreme example, when we will need to communicate with intelligent alien species: some form of mathematical symbolism is going to be our only possible meeting-point.

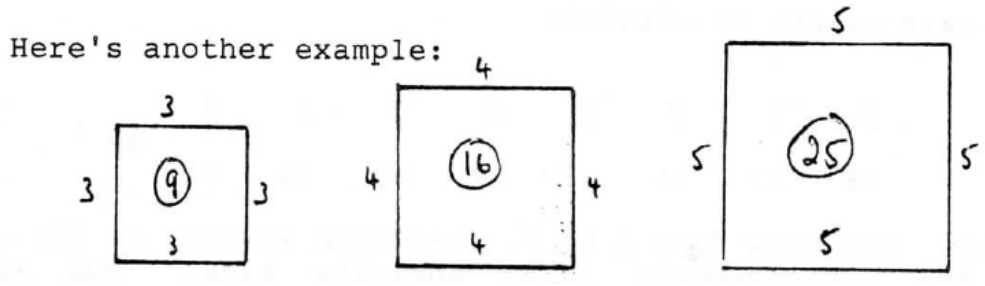
There <u>are</u> peculiar mathematical features to the universe, like the Fibonacci series or Bode's law; there are constants like the Reynolds number or the speed of light. The universe is describable in terms of number and this is still a description of its orderliness. And if we happen to believe in God, numbers are still, and always will be, a valid way of describing in abstract language the laws that God uses to govern the universe.

In fact, modern mathematical science and arithmology need not clash; there is no need, for scientists to pooh-pooh Pythagoreanism as they do. The two subjects simply deal with different areas. Arithmologists try to find meaning in number; mathematicians ignore that meaning and simply get on with doing mathematics. Here's an example, a favourite of the Pythagoreans.

I'll draw up two sequences of numbers, one formed by doubling and the other by trebling:

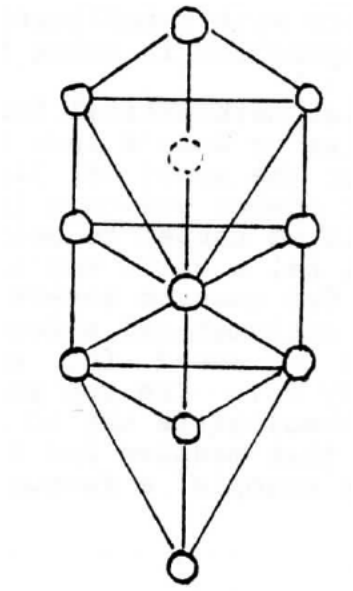
1	2	4	8	16	32	64	128	256	512
1	3	9	27	81	243	729	2187	6561	19683
s/c		s	c	s		s/c		s	c

You could extend these sequences as far as you liked, and the same feature would be true: every third place is occupied by a square number and every fourth place by a cube number; thus every seventh place is occupied by a number which is both square and cube. And there are other patterns in these sequences. These patterns are important to arithmologists; they are of no importance to mathematicians - why should they be? - but they are undeniably there. As I say, the two subjects occupy different domains.



The perimeter of squares whose sides are whole numbers and are less than 4 is greater than the surface area; the perimeter of squares whose sides are whole numbers and are more than 4 is less than the surface area. Again, this is meaningless to mathematicians; but it told the Pythagoreans something about the number 4 - that it symbolized equality or justice, for instance.

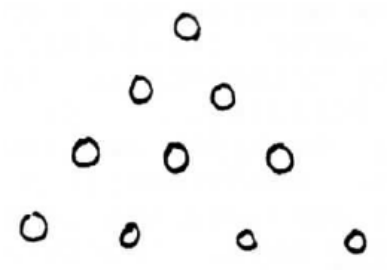
Right, now let's get down to some detail. The standard Kabbalistic diagram for the last few hundred years has been the Tree of Life, with which I'm sure most of you are familiar.



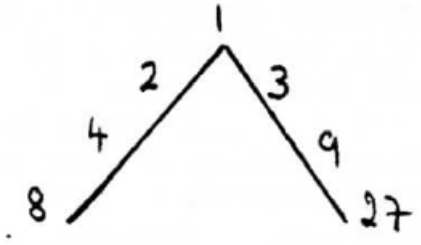
Ten sephirot (the word, by the way, means 'numbers') connected by paths. Even at first glance, we can see two laws being expressed by number: the law of 10, because there are 10 sephirot; and the law of 3, because there are 3 pillars. And it takes only a little acquaintance with Kabbalah to come across three further laws, expressible numerically as the law of 4, because there are 4 worlds; the law of 1, because all is one; and at least since Warren Kenton's work, we find the law of 7 or the law of octaves. Octave means 'eight', of course, but the eighth is the completion of the seven, and the start of a fresh octave, and moreover eight notes have seven intervals, so I shall continue to refer to this as the law of 7 (compare Gurdjieff's 'sacred heptaparaparshinokh', where 'hepta' means 'seven' in Greek) .

These laws - 1, 3, 4, 7, 10 - which are fundamental to Kabbalah, are the ones I shall use to try to illuminate Pythagoreanism.

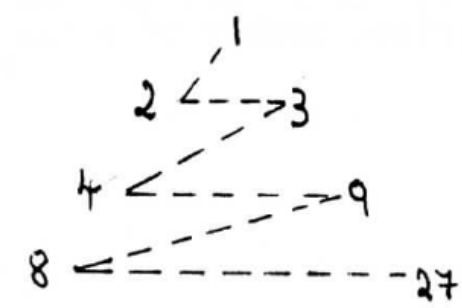
Equivalent to the Tree of Life, the standard Pythagorean diagram was the tetraktys.



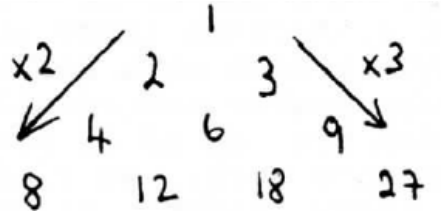
Those familiar with the Tree of Life are likely to look at this and want to start drawing in paths, but in fact there's very little evidence for such paths. The only evidence which occurs to me crops up in Plato's Timaeus; although this is already a digression, I'll go into it quickly, because some of the material will be useful later. In Timaeus Plato gives us what is called a lambda diagram, whose arms are formed by doubling and trebling three times; the numbers are the founding numbers of soul or life in his cosmology:



Peculiarly, Plato orders these numbers not sequentially, but as follows: 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 8, 27. The only possible reason that I can see for his doing this is to make us trace a Pythagorean lightning flash:



A lambda diagram becomes a full tetraktys by filling in the missing points. The way to convert Plato's lambda into a tetraktys is to follow the directions of multiplying by 2 or 3:



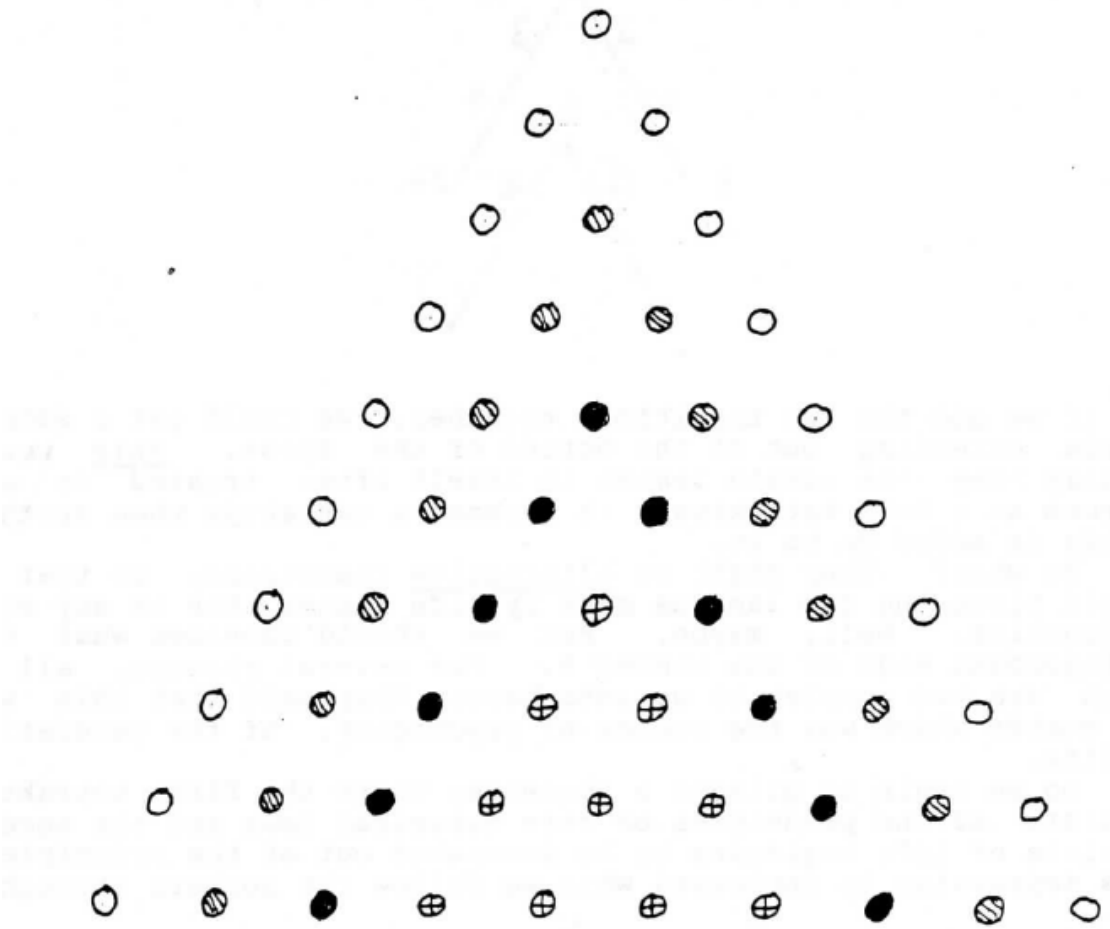
What I've done here, after Keith Critchlow, is follow the ×3 angle from 2 (making 6, then 18) and from 4 (making 12) – or conversely follow the ×2 angle from 3 (making 6, then 12) and from 9 (making 18). The missing numbers also form geometrical means: 4, 6, 9 is a geometrical proportion, and so is 8, 12, 18, 27.

Anyway, while there is some evidence that Pythagoreans looked for paths or routes through the tetraktys, that was not the chief way of looking at it. The word 'tetraktys' was coined from the root meaning 'four', and the way the Pythagoreans universally approached the diagram was simply to see it as four descending layers, as it were: 1+2+3+4=10. That fourfoldness could be given meaning by reference to the four elements, or seasons, or stages up to solidity, or principle ages of man, or tripartite soul and body, or types of time, or what have you. Whatever its manifestation, conformability to the four layers of the tetraktys represented completeness to the Pythagoreans; as The Theology of Arithmetic says: 'Everything in the universe turns out to be completed in the natural progression up to 4, in general and in particular, as does everything numerical – in short, everything whatever its nature.'

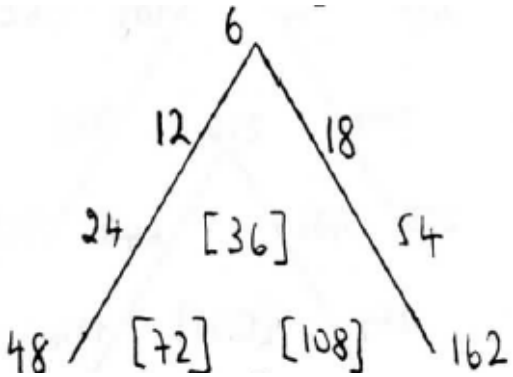
So the law of 4 is the law of completion or perfection in Pythagoreanism. In Saros philosophy we might say that once you have considered the structure, flow, rhythm and field of anything, then you have a complete picture of it; similarly, the Pythagoreans said that once you have considered anything as having size and being in motion, or size and being at rest, or relative quantity, or absolute quantity - that is, once you have considered anything from the standpoints of astronomy, geometry, music and arithmetic - then the picture is complete.

Finally on the law of 4, let me briefly and tentatively suggest that there is flimsy evidence for an extended tetraktys, precisely analogous to the extended Tree of Life, published particularly by Warren Kenton. Despite the fact that this is highly speculative, I'll mention it in pursuit of my aim of showing that the Pythagoreans were probably on to very similar lines of work as Kabbalists.

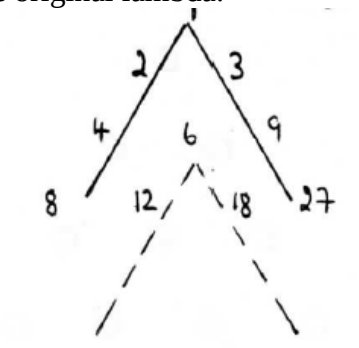
This is what the extended tetraktys would look like. You'll notice that, satisfyingly, there are ten layers to it, and that each layer has the appropriate number of dots.



The two related puzzles which lead me to believe that the Pythagoreans may have drawn up an extended tetraktys are these: first, why is the simple lambda diagram often called a tetraktys? It might be because of what we've already seen, that it is pretty easy to fill in the missing numbers; but let's hold off on that for a moment. The second puzzle is this. You remember the Platonic lambda we looked at a short while ago. Although the obvious way to take what Plato says is to do what I did – that is, take the number 1 as the apex of the lambda - yet alongside the ancient tradition of interpreting Plato this way is another one, which takes the number 6 as the apex of the lambda, and multiplies all the other numbers by 6 too.



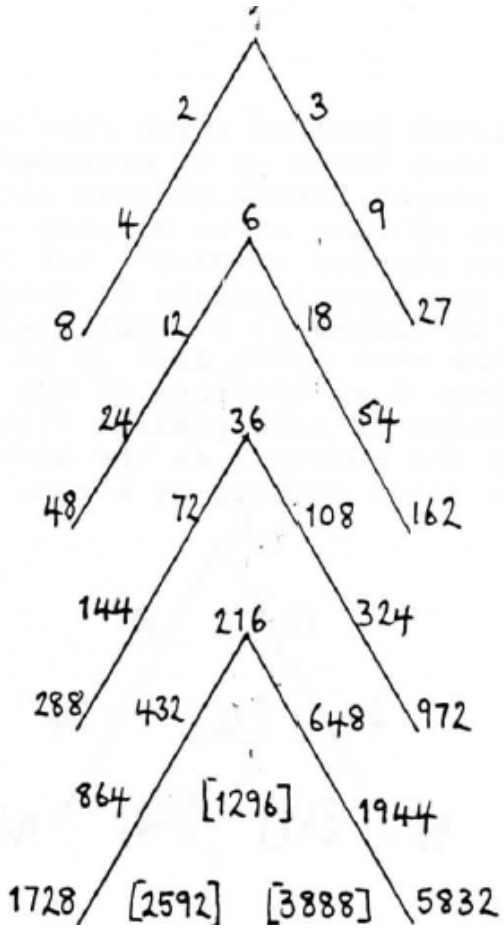
Now notice where 6 comes in the original lambda:



So if we add the two traditions together, we could get a second lambda extending out of the bottom of the first. This would explain why the simple lambda is itself often treated in our sources as a full tetraktys: it becomes a tetraktys when another lambda is added on to it.

So what? They might be alternative traditions, so that we should place the two lambdas side by side rather than in any such conjunction. Well, maybe. But we should consider what the Pythagoreans made of the number 6. For several reasons, all of which are too complex to go into here, they said that this was the number which was the source of psychogony, of the generation of life.

Do we begin to glimpse a sequence, where the first tetraktys consists of the principles or bare numerical laws and the second consists of life beginning to be generated out of the principles? This impression is increased when we follow the numbers through:



Notice that the apexes of the four lambdas are 1, 6, 36 and 216. The Pythagoreans would have loved this. We have a neat progression from point to line to plane to solid - that is, from 1, which contains everything potentially, to 6, to 6^2, and finally to 6^3 or solidity and three-dimensionality. And the progression goes through all the numbers which they found significant in psychogony and embryology: 1 is the seed of everything; 6 is the source of life and is the number of days they thought the seed was in the womb before conception; 36 is the minimum number of days they thought it took for the embryo to be fully formed; 216 is the minimum number of days they thought it took for an embryo to be viable.

So this is neat. To cap the notion that the law of 4 is the law of completion, we find that a sequence of four tetraktyes - 4×4, as it were - gives us the numbers for the completion of human life.

In case you think I'm barking up entirely the wrong tree, let me mention less disputable evidence that the Pythagoreans did like to overlap tetraktyes. Philolaus of Croton, in the fifth century B.C., was one of the most influential Pythagoreans. In a sense he can be said to be the founder of the tradition, just as Paul rather than Jesus is the founder of Christianity. Consequently, his work was taken as gospel throughout the 1000 years of the Pythagorean arithmological tradition. One of the main results of his work was that he came up with the following sequence:

1 - point, seed
2 - line, seed of movement
3 - plane
4 - solid, body (genital centre)
5 - vegetative soul (navel centre)
6 - animal soul (heart centre)
7 - rational soul (head centre)
8 - love, friendship, wisdom, creative thought
9 -
10 –

Frustratingly, our sources tell us nothing about the numbers 9 or 10: any suggestions will be gratefully received.

Now, all I want to point out about this sequence is that Philolaus has overlapped three tetraktyes: the first is the familiar one of point, line, plane, solid; the second is equally familiar - body and the three parts of soul; the third must remain uncertain, but seems to have to do with rational and suprarational faculties.

This is not, of course, the same extended tetraktys as I suggested before: Philolaus is overlapping three tetraktyes, not four. But it is a kind of evidence that even as early as the fifth century B.C., Pythagoreans were not averse to overlapping tetraktyes.

Philolaus will also serve to move us from the law of 4 to the law of 3, since he is overlapping three tetraktyes and getting a complete progression.

Since the law of 3 is also concerned with completion, we need to define the two laws more precisely. In Pythagoreanism, the law of 4 is hierarchical completion, or completion through

progression: 1+2+3+4=10, and 10 is all there is. The law of 3, however, is completion in the sense that everything falls under one of three forces, as we post-Gurdjieffians would put it.

Now, we must be careful here. It turns out that we must not assimilate the Pythagorean use of 3 to the Gurdjieffian and post-Gurdjieffian Law of Three. For Gurdjieff and so on, the Law of Three states, minimally, that everything is the result of three forces: there are three forces at work in everything, large and small. At one point, Philolaus comes close to saying that, but then seems to back-track (perhaps this is only a symptom of the notorious Pythagorean secrecy). It is far safer to say that the Pythagoreans did not go that far: they accurately identified three forces at work in the universe, but said that everything falls under one or another of them, not that everything consists of all three of them at once.

Since number informs the whole universe, the three forces are often expressed as evenness, oddness and even-oddness, or evenness, oddness and oneness, which is both even and odd at once. Or here is a quasi-mathematical expression of the same idea: everything has either excess or deficiency or occupies a mean point between the two. Or here is Philolaus's more abstract expression:

> All existing things must be either limiters or non-limiters or both limiters and non-limiters ... But since it is clear that they are neither wholly from limiters or wholly from non-limiters, then the universe and the things in it were harmonized from both limiters and non-limiters. [You see how close he gets to the Gurdjieffian concept; but then he goes on:] This is proved by things as they are: those which come from limiters limit; those which come from both limiters and non-limiters both limit and do not limit; those which come from non-limiters evidently do not limit.

One of the most interesting expressions of the Pythagorean law of 3 occurs in The Theology of Arithmetic:

> There are three Fates in theology because the whole life of both divine and mortal beings is governed by emission and receiving and thirdly requital, with the heavenly beings fertilizing in some way, the earthly beings receiving, as it were, and requitals being paid by means of those in the middle, as if they were a generation between male and female.

Anyway, enough on the law of 3: it's probably familiar stuff to you. Let's move on to the law of 7. Here again we'll find ourselves partly on familiar and partly on unfamiliar ground. We are used to seeing processes according to a musical analogy, in which a process is likened to a musical scale, complete with pause points for semitones. The Pythagoreans too viewed process as falling under a law of 7. They pointed to the seven ages in the process of human life, or the phases of the moon and tides and so on. Embryology and subsections of the seven ages were defined by sevens. They even made more spurious claims, such as that plants first appear above ground seven days after sowing.

So they were definitely familiar with the law of 7 as a law of process; but I know of no evidence that they made this into a musical analogy. And this is despite the fact that invariably, when discussing the number 7, they would mention the primacy of the musical heptachord and the famous theory of the harmony of the spheres - that the spheres of the six visible heavenly bodies and the so-called sphere of the fixed stars, as they revolve around the Earth, emit notes which together make up a heptachordal scale (not an octaval scale,

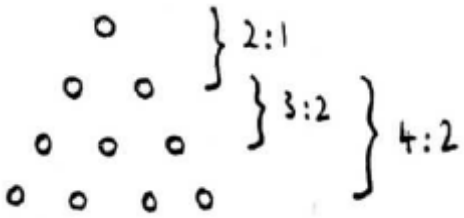
therefore, although Pythagoras is reported to be the first to have divided the scale into eight stages).

So, as I say, the Pythagoreans could have analysed processes as musical heptachords, at any rate, even if not as octaves. There is no evidence that they did so, but we might be justified in feeling that this is due merely to lack of evidence.

But it is also in remembering that our law of octaves is a law of process that we move on to less familiar ground in Pythagoreanism. Our law of octaves is basically the law that all complete processes fall into eight phases, with pause points, where the eighth phase is simultaneously the first phase of a new process. The obvious Pythagorean equivalent to this is not eightfold or even sevenfold, but is the tenfold race-course I drew up earlier, in which (you'll remember) numbers progress from 1 to 10, which is in turn 1 for a new sequence of numbers, and so on. The similarity with Kabbalah is remarkable: where Kabbalists say, 'Kether is Malkut and Malkut is Kether', Pythagoreans would say '1 is 10 and 10 is 1.' But the ten sephirot of the Tree of Life can accommodate the law of octaves only with the conception of pause points, and there is no sign of these in Pythagoreanism.

However, even on these tenfold terms we can find a Pythagorean musical analogy to our law of octaves. Again, it's not eightfold, but it is at least musical. The race-course image is just one way of expressing the idea that numbers are in process up to 10. The tetraktys is another, and we've already seen that the tetraktys incorporates the notion of process, in sequences such as point, line, plane, solid.

One of the reasons the Pythagoreans found the tetraktys so universal was precisely that it incorporates the three major musical intervals. They were the first to discover - and this probably goes back to Pythagoras himself - that the frequency of notes which are an octave apart is double; the ratio of the musical fifth is 3:2, a sesquialter; and the ratio of the musical fourth is 4:3, a sesquitertian. They also knew that these intervals are the building-blocks of musical scales. They fit neatly on to the tetraktys as follows:



Nowadays, by using the term octave esoterically, we use a musical analogy to describe processes which are not apparently musical. There is, let me repeat, no direct evidence that I know of to support the idea that the Pythagoreans used the same analogy for everyday things. But it is possible that they did. If they did, then they must have located the overall ratio of double in 4:2, not 2:1, so that the final layer of the tetraktys, 4, is double the start of the process at 2. The first layer, 1, would have been discounted because 1 is not actual, only potential. The Pythagorean 'musical' analysis of process would then have been as follows: 1 is potential; the process starts at 2, which is the source of movement, and continues through the ratios of 3:2 and 4:3 before completing with the ratio of 4:2. There is nothing here about eight stages, and nothing about pause points. If this is the Pythagorean musical analysis of process, it is a threefold analysis.

I should mention in passing that the application of the tetraktys which shows the musical intervals is almost certainly the original Pythagorean insight. Kosmos, you'll remember, means 'order'; the word harmonia means, primarily, 'fitting together' - i.e. that which makes orderly anything which is orderly. Then harmonia came to mean 'attunement', 'scale' and what we call 'octave'. Now imagine an unordered universe to be a cacophony of chaotic noise: the essential Pythagorean insight is that the first four numbers (which add up to 10) by their ratios create harmonia and kosmos.

What about the law of 10? I don't need to go into this separately, because you'll already have noticed that we keep having to return to 10. In discussing Pythagoreanism, you can't get away from 10. And that's the point: that is the Pythagorean law of 10, just as it is the Kabbalistic law too - that there are ten and only ten principles or laws governing the universe. Each number symbolizes or is a different law. We've already looked at Philolaus's fragmentary table; here is another, more abstract one, gleaned from here and there:

1 - stability
2 - movement
3 - mediacy
4 - completion
5 - appearance
6 - generation
7 - process
8 - foundation
9 - limitation
10 - reception

Or here's another, with human reference:

1 - happiness, intellect, memory
2 - opinion, daring
3 - prudence
4 - justice, virtue in general
5 - peace
6 - health
7 - growth
8 - security
9 - concord
10 - trust, power

And finally, here's another, for those of you who know your Greek deities:

1 - Zeus or Apollo or Prometheus
2 - Rhea
3 - Hecate
4 - Hermes or Heracles
5 - Aphrodite
6 - Amphitrite
7 - Athena or Chance
8 - Kronos
9 - Hera or Hephaestus or Kore
10 - Pan or Fate or Necessity

Since everything important must conform to ten-ness, they had to add to the number of astronomical bodies to reach 10. There were nine familiar ones: fixed stars, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon, Earth. Where could they get a tenth from? The gap was filled by a Counter-earth, which is like the Earth, but invisible to us because the inhabited part of our planet always faces away from it.

To return for a minute to the list of Greek gods I gave just now: there's no stable system here, and some important deities are missing, such as Hades, Poseidon, Artemis and Ares. (Hestia gets in as the deification of the fiery hearth which the Pythagoreans claimed occupied the centre of the universe and powered it up.) The reason for the lack of system is that the Pythagoreans were only trying to express or symbolize the ten principles. Just as Kabbalah is, so too Pythagoreanism is monotheistic. This is from Nicomachus:

> God coincides with the monad [1], since he is seminally everything which exists, just as the monad is in the case of number ... Just as without the monad there is in general no composition of anything, so also without it there is no knowledge of anything whatsoever, since it is a pure light, most authoritative over everything in general, and it is sun-like and ruling, so that in each of these respects it resembles God, and especially because it has the power of making things cohere and combine, even when they are composed of many ingredients and are very different from one another, just as God made this universe harmonious and unified out of things which are likewise opposed.
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> Furthermore, the monad produces itself and is produced from itself, since it is self-sufficient and has no power set over it and is everlasting, and it is evidently the cause of permanence, just as God is thought to be in the case of actual physical things, and to be the preserver and maintainer of natures.

And so on. This brings us, of course, to the last law I want to mention, the law of 1. In order to understand what the Pythagoreans say about 1, you first have to understand that 1 is not an actual number for them. There is no doubt that they would have used the concept of zero for a lot of what they say about 1, if they had had the concept of zero.

There are various mathematical ways in which they expressed the idea that 1 is not actually a number (and it is worth mentioning in passing that 2 was sometimes also seen as not an actual number). Perhaps the simplest reason they gave for excluding 1 is as follows: If any actual number is multiplied by another actual number, the product is greater than the sum of

their addition; this is not the case with 1; therefore 1 is not an actual number. This is pretty specious reasoning, but with some interesting metaphysical overtones, which the Pythagoreans occasionally hint at. What is it that is so essential to anything that it neither decreases or increases that thing when it is blended with it?

The Pythagoreans were also impressed by the fact that 1 starts all the sequences of the different types of number. I'm not going to go into all the different types of number in Greek mathematics, which is too long a subject for now. Suffice it to say, for instance, that 1 is the first square number and the first cube number.

In short, they reckoned that the nature of every type of number was found in the number 1. From there it is a short step to saying that it contains all numbers in potential; since numbers inform the whole universe, then 1 contains the whole universe. It is the matrix, out of which everything arises and to which it returns, since everything is completed at 10 and that is just a repetition of 1.

In Kabbalistic terms, we would say that Kether contains everything and also that everything - all the sephirot – arise out of their potential in Kether. There is no difference between this and what the Pythagoreans say about the number 1.

There is an awful lot to Pythagoreanism: it was a living tradition for 1000 years, and like any other tradition which lasts that long, it was clothed in different forms, and it contains obscurities and even contradictions between different sources. I have simply ignored all these, and you should know that I haven't even scratched the surface of Pythagoreanism: apart from anything else, I have hardly mentioned 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9, which were just as important in Pythagoreanism as the numbers I have touched on. However, although the evidence is often fragmentary and/or unreliable, it is abundantly clear that we are dealing with a thorough-going and complete mystical system. Any such system works provided it is big enough to encompass all seekers' approaches. No such system is any better than any other; all are different and should not be identified with any other. Saros philosophy, Kabbalah and astrology are three Western systems which will be familiar to all or some of the audience. If you're interested and you do the research, you'll find that Pythagoreanism is another - or rather (as I hope to have implied) that it is, under another guise, the same Western tradition within which we work even today.

Transcript from Saros Talks 1988.