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Aristotle and the Pythagorean Myths of Metempsychosis

This paper aims to analyze the tradition of the theory of the immortality of the soul and its metempsychosis, with the intention, on the one hand, of determining whether it can be traced back to the practice and doctrine of proto-Pythagoreanism, and on the other hand, of understanding to what extent it has contributed to the definition of the category of Pythagoreanism throughout history. The oldest testimonies attributing that doctrine to Pythagoras suggest two different hermeneutic routes. First, although old, the theory of the immortality of the soul, apocalyptic by its very nature, does not imply the existence of a dogmatic system of beliefs. That is to say that throughout the various strata of the Pythagorean tradition, the concept of this immortality significantly differed. Second, as a result of the first route, it turned out to be necessary to verify how the reception of the theory by later sources contributed to the construction, through it, of the category of Pythagoreanism. The testimonies of Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Ion and Empedocles suggest that metempsychosis is quite an old theory, corresponding to the proto-Pythagorean stratum. One finds in Aristotle the most explicit testimony of the existence of a proto-Pythagorean theory of metempsychosis: the use of the term *mýthoi* to refer to the Pythagorean doctrines of the soul suggests that Aristotle considered them sufficiently old, and therefore in all probability proto-Pythagorean. The Aristotelian lexicon ultimately will reveal proto-Pythagoreanism as the source of the doctrines of the immortality of the soul and its transmigration.

References

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Biography:

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