The Influence of the *Pythagorean Precepts* on the Later Pythagorean Tradition

Aristoxenus’ five books on the Pythagoreans clearly were an important source for the later Pythagorean tradition. However, if instead of treating Aristoxenus’ Pythagorean works as a group we are careful to focus just on the *Pythagorean Precepts* the situation is more complicated and interesting. Clearly the *Precepts* had a significant influence on Stobaeus and Iamblichus. The seven excerpts from the *Precepts* are an important part of the Pythagorean texts in Stobaeus’ overall collection of texts for the edification of his son. The *Precepts* bulk even larger in Iamblichus’ *On the Pythagorean Way of Life* where they constitute roughly 23 out of the 267 sections of the text (10 pages out of 115 pages in Dillon and Hershbell’s text). This means that they account for 8–9% of the text, which is notable for a single work.\(^1\) With the examples of Stobaeus and Iamblichus in mind we might well expect that much of the rest of the Pythagorean tradition, at least where the focus is on ethical precepts, would also rely heavily on the *Precepts*. This does not, however, appear to be the case. There are a number of texts that present sets of precepts for the Pythagorean way of life, the most important of which are: 1) portions of Diogenes Laertius’ *Life of Pythagoras* (8.22–4), 2) portions of Porphyry’s *Life of Pythagoras* (38–41), 3) Diodorus Siculus’ account of Pythagoreanism (10.3–11), 4) Iamblichus’ report of the four speeches that Pythagoras supposedly gave on his arrival in Croton (*VP* 37–57) and 5) some of the pseudo-Pythagorean texts collected by Thesleff. Although some scholars have claimed that these texts rely heavily on the *Precepts*,

\(^1\) Iamblichus draws on other works of Aristoxenus than just the *Precepts*. Most scholars would argue that Aristoxenus is one of the three major sources for Iamblichus’ *On the Pythagorean Way of Life*, but, in fact, he only refers to Aristoxenus four times in that work. Three references (233, 234, 237) occur in regard to the story of the Pythagorean friends Damon and Phintias, which Iamblichus explicitly says came from Aristoxenus’ work entitled *On the Pythagorean Way of Life*. The fourth reference (251) is to Aristoxenus’ account of the attacks on the Pythagorean societies in southern Italy, although Iamblichus does not indicate what work of Aristoxenus he is drawing on in this case.
they, in fact, show only very limited similarity to the extant fragments of the Precepts.

Before beginning a detailed examination of each of these texts and their relationship to the Precepts, an important point of methodology must be raised. Only fragments of the Precepts survive, so that simply noting that a given list of precepts does not overlap with the Precepts on every point need not mean that the list is not drawing on the Precepts, since it may be drawing on sections of it that have not survived. This means that it is not necessary that every point in a given text needs to correspond to something in the Precepts in order for that text to be drawing on them. However, to make a convincing case that a given text is drawing on the Precepts, it is necessary to show that at least some of the material in the text parallels what is said in the Precepts in a clear and specific way. The similarity needs to be more than just a general agreement in outlook. If such material is present then we may well regard other parts of the surrounding text, which do not specifically parallel the surviving fragments of the Precepts, as nonetheless likely to rely on them.

Mewaldt argued that Diogenes Laertius 8.22–4 and Porphyry, VP 38–41 show great similarity to one another and derive this similarity from their both being basically summaries of Aristoxenus’ Pythagorean Precepts (1904: 39–40). He is right that these two texts do share striking similarities to each other, which suggest that they are drawing on similar sources, but far from showing a close connection to the Precepts, they seem to have been composed with little if any use of the Precepts. The parallels between Diogenes and Porphyry are a good example of the sort of specific parallel required to suggest a common source. Thus, Diogenes 8.23 advises one “never to kill nor injure any cultivated plant nor even any animal that does not injure mankind,” and in Porphyry VP 39 we find “one should neither destroy nor damage any cultivated plant that bears good fruit nor any animal that is not harmful to mankind.” There is some variation in language between the two passages but some quite specific phrases are virtually identical (φυτὸν ἠμερον . . . ἀλλὰ μηδὲ ζωὸν ὁ μὴ βλάπτει [βλαβερόν]). Again, in Diogenes Laertius 22 Pythagoras’ disciples are advised to always say on entering their home “Where did I trespass? What did I achieve? What have I not done that I should have done?” In Porphyry VP 40 the situation is changed slightly in that the disciples are supposed to say the words before sleep rather than on arriving home but the words said are identical. These two
passages show beyond doubt that Diogenes Laertius and Porphyry are using a common source for some of the material they report.

If Diogenes Laertius 8.22–4 and Porphyry VP 38–41 were basically summaries of the Precepts as Mewaldt suggests, we would certainly expect that the two passages quoted in the last paragraph derived from the Precepts. However, neither of these passages is found in the surviving fragments of the Precepts. We might still save these passages for the Precepts if at least some specific parallels of this sort were found between the Precepts and Diogenes Laertius 8.22–4 and Porphyry VP 38–41. If these specific parallels existed then we could suppose that the passages common to Diogenes and Porphyry discussed in the last paragraph were from the Precepts but were found in passages that have not survived. However, no such specific parallels can be found between the surviving fragments of the Precepts and either Diogenes Laertius 8.22–4 or Porphyry VP 38–41.

Before looking at the specific precepts in Diogenes 8.22–4, it is important to note that the language used to introduce them is not at all similar to what we find in the Precepts. Thus, the term for precept in Aristoxenus (ἄποφασις) does not appear in Diogenes. Diogenes instead uses a word “recommended” (παρεγγυᾶν) that appears nowhere in the Precepts. The passage in Diogenes can be roughly divided into the following eighteen precepts:

1. Upon entering the house say: “Where did I trespass? What did I achieve? What have I not done that I should have done?”
2. Prevent victims from being offered to the gods.
3. Worship only at an altar unstained with blood.
4. Do not swear by the gods since a man should strive to make himself worthy of trust.
5. Honor elders, since what precedes in time is more valuable, as in the world sunrise is more valuable than sunset, in life the beginning is more valuable than the end, and in living generation is more valuable than destruction.
6. Honor the gods before the daimones, heroes before men, and of men most of all one’s parents.
7. Associate with others so as not to make friends enemies but to make enemies friends.
8. Deem nothing your own.
9. Aid the law but fight with lawlessness.
10. Never kill nor injure any cultivated plant nor an animal that does not harm mankind.
11. Neither be overcome by laughter nor be sullen.
12. Avoid an excess of meat.
13. On a journey let exertions and rest alternate.
14. Train the memory.
15. Neither do nor say anything in anger.
16. Honor all divination.
17. Sing to the lyre and by hymns show due gratitude to the gods and good men.
18. Abstain from beans because they produce gas and partake most of the breath of life, besides it is better for the stomach, if they are not taken and this will make dreams and sleep untroubled.

Of these eighteen only three (6, 9 and 14) show any sort of parallel with the extant fragments of the Precepts. Even in these cases the parallels are of a very general sort and do not have the sort of specificity required to suggest that Diogenes is relying on the Precepts in this passage.

Mewaldt (1904: 40) seized on precepts 6 (“Honor the gods before the daimones, heroes before men, and of men most of all one’s parents”) and 9 (“Aid the law but fight with lawlessness”) and pointed to a parallel with fragment 8 of the Precepts (= Iambl. VP 174–6 – “After the divine and the daimones pay most attention to parents and the law”). The idea that one should honor the gods first and then one’s parents and the laws is one of the most widespread in ancient Greek culture (see the commentary on fr. 8) and indeed in most cultures. The appearance of these ideas in DL thus hardly requires that Aristoxenus was the specific source. Moreover, the details of the presentation of these precepts do not match what is found in the Precepts. Thus, Diogenes mentions the heroes who do not appear in the Precepts. More importantly the argument for honoring elders (and hence the gods and parents) in Diogenes (i.e. that which comes first in time deserves more respect) as well as the examples that support it (e.g., sunrise and sunset) are not found in this context in the Precepts. Conversely the argument given in the Precepts for honoring the gods, parents and laws (i.e. human beings are by nature hubristic and need as many checks on their hubris as possible) does not appear in Diogenes. It is true that the Precepts, in a different context,
present an argument that is similar to what is found in Diogenes. In a discussion of the first principles of science and of rulers in political associations the Pythagoreans of the Precepts argue that a first principle/router is more honorable (fr. 10 = Iambl. VP 182–3). However, while this passage may show that the Pythagoreans of the Precepts might have found the argument given in Diogenes congenial, this does not show that they used the argument reported in Diogenes with regard to elders and parents.

There are a number of other precepts in Diogenes 8.22–4 that we could well imagine that the Pythagoreans of the Precepts might accept (e.g., 15. Never to say or do anything in anger). However, this is not surprising. We would expect some similarity in the views of different groups that call themselves Pythagoreans. In the case of other precepts we simply do not know what the authors of the Precepts would have thought. Did they worship only at bloodless altars (3) or avoid beans (18)? Nothing in the surviving fragments of the Precepts allows us to answer such questions. It is true that points 9 and 10 do find a close parallel in language with Iamblichus VP 99–100 (e.g., νόμῳ τε βοηθεῖν καὶ ἀνομίᾳ πολεμεῖν), which I have argued above is likely to come from Aristoxenus’ On the Pythagorean Way of Life, so that work is one of the ultimate sources for the list of precepts in Diogenes Laertius 8.22–4. In the case of the Precepts, however, the only similarities with the list of precepts in Diogenes are of such a general character and shared with so many other Greek ethical texts (e.g., honor the gods and your parents), that there are no grounds for supposing that the Precepts were a source for Diogenes 8.22–4.

The situation is similar in the case of Porphyry VP 38–41. Again Porphyry does not use Aristoxenus’ word for precept (ἀπόφασις) anywhere in his discussion, using instead a word (παρῄνει) not found in the Precepts. Eleven precepts can be derived from this passage of Porphyry:

1. Speak well of the race of the gods and daimones and heroes.
2. Be well disposed to parents and benefactors.
3. Obey the laws.
4. Do not worship the gods by the way but of set purpose.
5. Sacrifice things in odd numbers to the heavenly gods and in even numbers to those of the underworld. For the better is the monad and light and right and equal and enduring and straight and the worse the dyad and darkness and left and unequal and transient and curved.
6. One should neither destroy nor damage any cultivated plant that bears good fruit nor any animal that is not harmful to man.

7. One should faithfully keep a deposit not only of money but words.

8. One should recognize three classes of important matters that should be undertaken, first the honorable and noble, second the beneficial for life and third the pleasant.

9. There are two sorts of pleasure. That which through luxury pleases the stomach and sexual desire he compared to the songs of the Sirens but that found in things noble and righteous and necessary for life, which is both immediately pleasant and remains unchanged in the future, he said was like the harmony of the muses.

10. Two times of day should receive special attention, going to sleep and arising. In the first people should review what they have done and in the second what is about to happen. Every one should receive correction from themselves for what they have done and take thought for the future. Before sleep everyone should sing the following verses and not go to sleep before thrice reviewing the day’s actions: In what way have I transgressed? What have I accomplished? What have I not done that I should have? On arising one should scrutinize what actions he will perform in the day.

11. Tell the truth, for only this can make man like god. For he learned from the Magi that even of God the body is like light and the soul like truth.

The majority of these precepts (4–7 and 9–11) find no parallel at all in the Precepts (although point 6 has a parallel with Aristoxenus’ On the Pythagorean Way of Life [Iambl. VP 99]). The first three (honoring the gods, parents and laws) do correspond to the Precepts in general terms but these are once again very common concepts in Greek society in general so that, just as in the case of Diogenes 8.22–4 where they also appeared, there is no compelling argument that they derive specifically from the Precepts. None of the specific language used to make these points in Porphyry (εὐφήμον, ἀγαθὴν ἔχειν διάνοιαν, εὔγνων) finds a parallel in the Precepts. The closest parallel to the Precepts is found in point 8, where the three classes of important matters that should be undertaken are identified as 1) the honorable and noble (εὐκλεῖων καὶ καλῶν) 2) the beneficial for life (συμφερόντων) and 3) the pleasant.
In fragment 9 of the *Precepts* (Iambl. VP 204) the Pythagoreans say that in our actions we should aim most of all at the noble and seemly (καλόν τε καὶ ἐυσχήμων) and secondarily at the advantageous and beneficial (συμφέρον τε καὶ ὑφέλιμον). The first two of the three items listed in Porphyry are the same, listed in the same order and there is some overlap in specific vocabulary. All of this certainly suggests that this precept in Porphyry may have had the *Precepts* as one source. However, in another respect this passage in Porphyry is in direct conflict with the *Precepts*. It recognizes pleasure as the third legitimate object of pursuit and makes a distinction between two types of pleasure. The *Precepts*, on the other hand, make no such distinction in types of pleasure and emphatically assert that we should never do anything with pleasure as the aim (fr. 9). It thus appears that what is found in Porphyry is a later reworking of what is said in the *Precepts* which adopts a more conciliatory attitude towards pleasure.

In sum, only one item in Porphyry suggests a direct connection to the *Precepts* and that item has itself been significantly revised. Taking the evidence of Diogenes Laertius and Porphyry together it is clear that neither one was drawing directly on the *Precepts*. Both are probably relying on later doxographical sources and the similarities between their accounts noted above show that their sources clearly overlap. However, there is little evidence that those doxographical sources relied on the *Precepts* to any significant extent either. The overlap with item 8 in Porphyry is the only convincing evidence that the *Precepts* played any role in the formation of Diogenes’ and Porphyry’s sources and in that case the approach of the *Precepts* has already been modified.

VP 233); 4) Archytas’ refusal to punish in anger (10.7, cf. fr. 30 = Iambl. VP 197); 5) The attack on the Pythagoreans by Cylon (11.1, cf. fr. 18 = Iambl. VP 248ff.). It may also be that the story of Cleinias and Prorus goes back to Aristoxenus but this is less certain (4.1–2, cf. Iambl. VP 239 – not specifically ascribed to Aristoxenus). There are, however, two important things to note about this evidence. First, as all scholars have recognized, Diodorus is not using Aristoxenus directly. All of the material has been heavily reworked (von Fritz 1940: 23–6; Schorn 2013) so that in some cases the emphasis of the story has been significantly changed (e.g., Damon and Phintias). Von Fritz concludes that the material from Aristoxenus “has undergone a number of alterations” and that “in some cases it is very likely that there were several successive alterations” (1940: 26). Second, there has been a tendency to overstate the influence of Aristoxenus. There are about ten pages of Greek text in the Loeb edition of Diodorus and the material deriving from Aristoxenus amounts to a little over two pages, so we can only be confident that 20–25% of Diodorus’ account ultimately derives from Aristoxenus. It is of course possible that other material for which we have no explicit parallel also derives from Aristoxenus, but there is some material that cannot come from Aristoxenus (e.g., the reference to Callimachus [10.6.4], who lived much later) and other material that conflicts with what is attested about Aristoxenus’ presentation of Pythagoreanism (the statement in 10.6.1 that Pythagoras did not eat meat). So it would be a mistake to assume that everything is from Aristoxenus because some passages are. The secure evidence thus shows Aristoxenus to be an important source but to say that “most” of the material comes from Aristoxenus or that it “chiefly” comes from Aristoxenus overstates the case. It is better to follow Burkert in saying that Aristoxenus was “among” Diodorus’ sources (1972: 104). Schorn similarly does not identify Aristoxenus as Diodorus’ main source noting just “there is some agreement with fragments of Aristoxenus” (2014: 313; for more detail see Schorn 2013).

It is important to note that the material in Diodorus cited above as deriving from Aristoxenus comes from other works of Aristoxenus and none of it comes from the Pythagorean Precepts. Diodorus does, however, present a considerable amount of material that takes the form of precepts along with the biographical information about Pythagoras and anecdotes about Pythagoreans. Does any of this material derive from the
Precepts? The following are the main precepts and practices that can be identified in Diodorus:

1) (10.5.1) They trained the memory in the following way. They did not arise until they had told one another what they had done the day before. If they had time they would report what they did on the third and fourth day past and even earlier.

2) (10.5.2) They trained themselves in self-control by having banquets served to them and then sending them away without eating them.

3) (10.7.1) Pythagoras urged his followers to cultivate the simple life (λιτότης). For, extravagance (πολυτέλεια) ruins fortunes and bodies. Most diseases come from indigestion (ὠμότης) and this from extravagance.

4) (10.7.2) He persuaded many to eat uncooked food and drink only water.

5) (10.8.1) The Pythagoreans emphasized constancy (βεβαιότης) to friends believing that the loyalty of friends was the greatest good in life.

6) (10.8.3) The Pythagoreans put nothing about loyalty to friends in writing and carried their precepts only in memory so that no outsider ever found out what they were.

7) (10.9.1) Pythagoras commanded his pupils to rarely take an oath but, if they did, to abide by it in all things.

8) (10.9.3) Pythagoras said that it is better to approach a woman in the summer not at all and in winter only sparingly.

9) (10.9.3) They thought that every kind of pleasure in love is harmful and indulgence in them is weakening and destructive.

10) (10.9.4) Pythagoras said that you should engage in the pleasures of love only when you wish not to be master of yourself.

11) (10.9.5) The Pythagoreans divided the life of man into four ages – the child, the young man, the man and the old man. The child is parallel to spring, the young man to summer, the man to fall and the old man to winter.

12) (10.9.6) Pythagoras taught that when worshipping the gods garments should be not costly but white and clean. The body should be clean but also the soul undefiled.

13) (10.9.7) Pythagoras said that the prudent man should pray to the gods for good things on behalf of imprudent men, for the foolish are ignorant of what is good.
14) (10.9.8) Pythagoras said one should pray simply for all good things and not name things singly like power, strength, beauty and wealth, since these latter can ruin those who receive them. An example is given from the Phoenician Maidens of Euripides.

There is very little to suggest that most of this material is derived from the Pythagorean Precepts. The general format in Diodorus argues against any close connection, since most of what Diodorus says is presented as the teaching of Pythagoras himself, contrary to Aristoxenus’ universal practice of presenting his precepts as what the Pythagoreans as a group thought. Moreover, Aristoxenus’ word for precept (ἀπόφασις) is again not found in Diodorus. It is quite possible that the Pythagoreans of the Precepts would agree with a number of the fourteen points listed. However, there are almost no parallels at the specific level. Thus, surely the Pythagoreans of the Precepts believe that self-control is a good thing and urge simplicity of life in agreement with points 2 and 3. However, it is not enough to say that the exercise with the banquets fits with the attitude towards desire in the Precepts (Schorn 2013); the exercise would fit with most philosophers’ attitudes towards desire and self-control. The crucial point is that there is no agreement in the details. There is nothing in the Precepts about having banquets served and then refusing to eat them nor about extravagance producing indigestion and indigestion disease. Again, the Precepts value friendship and are wary about pleasure but do not use the key terms (e.g., βεβαιότης) or examples (e.g., avoiding sex in the summer) found in Diodorus. There is only a specific parallel with the Precepts in one case, point 11. The material in point 11 is also reported by Diogenes Laertius (8.9), who explicitly assigns it to a pseudo-Pythagorean work known as the Tripartitum, which dates sometime before 200 BC (Centrone 2014: 317). Close study of the similarity between these passages shows that it is far from clear that the Precepts served as a source for the Tripartitum and hence this passage in Diodorus. Moreover, if it was a source it is unlikely to have been used directly (see the detailed discussion of the Tripartitum below). Point 9 has no specific parallel with the material in the Precepts but does agree in adopting a negative attitude to all sexuality. More importantly, it shows some of the typical stylistic features of the Precepts (see the “Pythagorean views on Sex and Procreation Outside of the Precepts” in the commentary on section 6 of fr. 9). In particular, although modern editors have
emended the text so that the verbs are singular with Pythagoras understood as the subject, the manuscript has the plural for one of the verbs and the plural, which is typical of the Precepts, is thus the preferable reading as the lectio difficilior (see Appendix 3). Accordingly there is a real possibility that this one sentence in Diodorus is based fairly closely on the Precepts and I have included it in Appendix 3 as subsidiary fragment 4. But this seems to be the exception rather than the rule. As we have seen, at most two of the fourteen precepts listed in Diodorus have some probability of deriving from the Pythagorean Precepts. Once again as was the case with Diogenes Laertius and Porphyry there is little evidence to suggest that the Precepts played a major role in the formulation of lists of precepts in the later doxographical tradition for Pythagoreanism.

Another important set of Pythagorean precepts are to be found in the four speeches that Iamblichus presents Pythagoras as delivering shortly after his arrival in Croton (VP 37–54). These speeches are delivered to the young men of Croton, the thousand men who served on the council of the city, the boys and finally the women. It is usually thought that none of the speeches go back to the time of Pythagoras but are rather later compositions. In the form we have them they are likely to be derived from one of Iamblichus’ main sources, Apollonius (of Tyana?), who uses Timaeus of Tauromenium as an important source (Rohde 1871–2 = 1901: 132–5; Schorn 2014: 307; Zhmud 2012a: 69–70). However, some scholars have suggested that Aristoxenus’ Pythagorean Precepts were also a source (Zhmud 2012a: 70 n.36; Zucconi 1970) or even a major source (Mewaldt 1904: 47). Careful examination of the speeches in comparison with the Precepts shows that the similarities are at the most general of levels and that there is no convincing evidence that the Precepts were used as a source for any of the speeches.

In the speech to the young men of Croton three main points are made: the young men should 1) esteem their elders 2) practice temperance and 3) pursue paideia. The Pythagoreans of the Precepts surely agreed with all of these points but so would most ancient Greeks. Any argument for specific dependence on the Precepts would need to be based on the details of the development of these points but there is little similarity to the way in which these points are developed in the speech and in the Precepts. The speech supports the call for the young to honor their elders by an appeal to the general principle that what precedes in time is more
honorable than what follows. A series of examples are then given to illustrate the principle: the sun’s rising is more honorable than its setting, the dawn more honorable than the evening, the beginning more honorable than the end, birth more than death, natives more than foreigners, gods more than daimones, daimones more than demigods, heroes more than humans. As we have seen above, Diogenes Laertius mentions the same general principle and also includes most of the same examples (8.22–3). So it is clear that Diogenes and this speech in Iamblichus are drawing on the same source. There is no reason to believe, however, that the source in question was the Precepts. As noted above in the discussion of Diogenes the Precepts mention neither the general principle nor any of the numerous examples. The speech goes on to give further arguments for honoring one’s parents and then adds evidence from mythology noting that Homer glorified Zeus by calling him “father of the gods and mortals” and that Heracles carried out his labors out of obedience to someone older than himself. None of these further arguments or examples from mythology are found in the Precepts.

Mewaldt thought that sections 174–6 in Iamblichus’ On the Pythagorean Way of Life were the basis on which the speech was founded (1904: 47). But although that passage agrees with the speech that we should honor the gods and the daimones first and after them our parents (a view that surely most Greeks would accept), it lacks the arguments and examples listed above which are used in the speech and puts forth its own arguments that are not found in the speech. The key terms in the speech are “what proceeds” and “what follows” (τὸ προηγούμενον, τὸ ἑπόμενον) neither of which appears in the Precepts, while in the Precepts the argument is that because we have a great complexity (ποικιλία) of desires and are naturally prone to insolence (ὑβριστικῶν) we need the superior authority of the gods and our parents to produce self-control and order. Neither this argument nor its key terms appears anywhere in Pythagoras’ speech to the young men at Croton. The Precepts develop the point further by asserting that there is no greater evil than anarchy. This memorable point also finds no parallel in Pythagoras’ speech.

Zucconi (1970: 495–6) tries to show parallels with a different passage of the Precepts, Iamblichus VP 182 (fr. 10). He sets out the text of Pythagoras’ speech to the young men alongside texts from Diogenes Laertius 8.22–3 and Iamblichus VP 182 (fr. 10) to show the similarity of the texts and suggest that Aristoxenus was the ultimate source for the
other two texts. However, the close parallels are all between Diogenes Laertius and Pythagoras’ speech. Iamblichus VP 182 does not focus on elders as the other two passages do, nor does it mention the key terms “what follows” and “what precedes” as they both do, nor does it give any of the examples of the key terms, some of which are shared by the two texts (rising/settling and generation/destruction). It does share with the other passages the general idea that a beginning or first principle (ἀρχή) is to be honored, but in the Precepts the emphasis is on the notion of first principle as is shown by the emphasis on knowledge and the sciences, which is totally lacking in Diogenes Laertius and Pythagoras’ speech to the youth. The Precepts only parallel the other texts at the specific level by mentioning generation and the city as areas in which the first principle is to be honored. All of this suggests that what we find in the Precepts is a parallel development of a similar idea rather than being the source for what is found in Pythagoras’ speech to the young men and in Diogenes Laertius 8.22–3.

The speech goes on to state that in our associations with others we should never become enemies to friends but try to become friends to enemies. This statement finds an exact parallel in Diogenes Laertius (8.23) but although the Precepts discuss friends and associations there is no such statement. Once again there is good reason to think that Diogenes and the speech of Pythagoras are using the same source but no reason to think that the source is the Precepts. Pythagoras then urges the young to practice the virtue of temperance, arguing among other things that it embraces both goods of the body and goods of the soul. The importance of self-control is then illustrated by the negative example of the Trojan War where the failure of one person to exercise self-control led to misfortunes for many. None of this discussion of temperance finds a parallel in the Precepts, although temperance is mentioned in several places (Iambl. VP 175). Pythagoras then finishes the speech with a long argument for the value of mental culture (παιδεία). The Precepts clearly value training of the mind but they never use the term παιδεία nor make any of these arguments. Thus, the only parallels between Pythagoras’ speech to the young men and the Precepts are very general notions such as that we should honor the gods and parents and that temperance is a good thing – notions found in a wide range of Greek texts. When we look for parallels in the specific way these ideas are developed nothing is to be found, so that there is no
reason to suspect that whoever composed Pythagoras’ speech was in any way relying on the Precepts.

The situation is similar with the remaining three speeches of Pythagoras in Iamblichus so that there is no reason to go into such detail. The council members are urged to understand that they hold their country as a common deposit from the citizens, that they should be equal to the citizens and surpass them only in justice, that they should not misuse the gods’ names in an oath, that they should provide the management of their own households as a model for their management of the state, that they should be genuinely well-disposed toward their offspring and try to be loved by them not just because of the relationship but because of their character, that they should know only their wives and regard them as suppliants, that they should be examples of discipline and temperance, and that they make sure that the people are motivated not by fear of punishment but by shame at wrongdoing. This is a large number of fairly specific precepts none of which are paralleled in the Precepts. In only one case is there a prima facie connection with the Precepts. In section 49, Pythagoras tells the councilors that there is nothing better than the right time (καιρός). There is a long discussion of the right time in the Precepts (Iambl. VP 180–3 = fr. 10) so we might think that here at last is a specific parallel. But once again it is precisely the specific parallel that is lacking. In the speech Pythagoras introduces the notion of the right time in support of his call on the councilors to avoid laziness. If you are not lazy and always ready you will be prepared when the opportunity arises. The Precepts say nothing about laziness. On the other hand the Precepts’ detailed discussion of what is appropriate in terms of the age, relationship and status of the people involved (VP 180 = fr. 10) is not found in Pythagoras’ speech. Once again the only similarity is simply in the use of the concept of the “right time,” but this concept is found in many Greek texts from Hesiod onward and again there is no indication that the author of Pythagoras’ speech was using the specific discussion of καιρός found in the Precepts.

In his third speech Pythagoras advises the boys of Croton, among other things, to neither begin a quarrel nor defend oneself against one, to be eager for paideia, to practice listening in order to be able to speak, to start now on the path they will follow as adults, not to contradict elders so that when they become elders they will not be contradicted. Some of this may be good advice and agrees in general terms with some of what is
said in the *Precepts* but none of it nor anything else in the speech to the boys finds a specific parallel in the *Precepts*. Pythagoras gives his fourth and final speech to the women of Croton. He gives them a series of precepts on how to carry out sacrifices (e.g., make what they offer with their own hands; don’t spend lavishly on sacrifices). He advises them to love their husbands more than their fathers and that they may enter the temple on the same day after sleeping with their husbands but after sleeping with another man never. This is followed by a series of other precepts, some illustrated by myth. Nothing of what is said to the women is paralleled in the *Precepts*. It is thus clear that the *Precepts* are very unlikely to have served as a source for any of the four speeches that Iamblichus presents Pythagoras giving at Croton. There are very few parallels at all and the only parallels are at such a level of generality (e.g., honor the gods and one’s parents, pay attention to the right time) that they cannot serve as a basis for suggesting that *Precepts* had any connection with what Iamblichus presents Pythagoras as saying.

There is some evidence for the influence of the *Precepts* in another area of the Pythagorean tradition, the pseudo-Pythagorean writings, although this influence is often overstated (Zhmud 2012a: 65, n. 17 “this work . . . exerted a strong influence on the pseudo-Pythagorean ethical treatises”; cf. Centrone 1990: 38–41, whom Zhmud cites). The prime example of this influence is the clear borrowing from the *Precepts* in a passage of the pseudo-Pythagorean treatise *On the Nature of the Universe* by Ocellus, which was probably composed in the first century BC or a little earlier. The detailed verbal parallels between sections 52–3 of Ocellus and an excerpt from the *Precepts* in Stobaeus (4.37.4) and in Iamblichus (VP 209) are set out in Chapter 5 of the Introduction. As demonstrated there, Ocellus shows a closer connection to the version in Iamblichus and both are likely to be based on a source which had already paraphrased and expanded Aristoxenus’ original text, which is more closely preserved in Stobaeus. That Ocellus should take over a passage from the *Precepts* wholesale in this way is not surprising since elsewhere in *On the Nature of the Universe* passages from Aristoxenus’ teacher Aristotle’s *On Generation and Corruption* are taken over in a similar way (sections 24–9 = Gen. corr. 329a32–331a1).

Beyond this passage in Ocellus there is, however, only one other passage in the pseudepigrapha that has a reasonable chance of being dependent on the *Precepts*. A fragment from the pseudo-Pythagorean
treatise On Law and Justice ascribed to Archytas in Stobaeus (Thesleff 36.2–4 = Stobaeus 4.5.61) asserts that the true ruler must not only be knowledgeable and able with regard to ruling well but also humane (μὴ μόνον ἐπιστάμονα τε καὶ δυνατόν ἴμεν περὶ τὸ καλὸς ἄρχεν ἀλλὰ καὶ φιλάνθρωπον). Fragment 2 of the Precepts similarly reports that the rulers should be not only knowledgeable but also humane (οὐ μόνον ἐπιστήμονας ἄλλα καὶ φιλανθρώπους). The passages are not identical but partially identical language used in the same context makes a connection fairly likely.

A series of other passages from the pseudepigrapha have been thought by various scholars to show influence from the Precepts, but closer examination shows that none of these supposed instances of influence is convincing. Thus, at first sight a passage from the pseudo-Pythagorean treatise Prelude to the Laws ascribed to Zaleucus (Stob. 4.2.19 = Thesleff 226.24–228.21) appears to have close connections to fragment 8 of the Precepts (Mewaldt 1904: 45), but detailed study shows that the differences between the passages are more striking than the similarities and that the Prelude to the Laws has closer connections to Book 10 of Plato’s Laws (see the commentary on fr. 8).

Mewaldt (1904: 45) points to the similarity between Diotogenes’ point that men pay great attention to how young vines are to be taken care of while neglecting the rearing of young men and fragment 9 of the Precepts, where the complaint is that men take great care of young animals but not young human beings (Mewaldt cites Iambl. VP 204 but the point is also made at 212–13). The problem with Mewaldt’s point is that the comparison between taking care of young animals or plants and taking care of young people was fairly widespread in Greek culture (see e.g., Theognis 183–92) and not limited to the Precepts so that Diotogenes need not be relying on the Precepts, especially since Diotogenes talks about plants and the Precepts about animals. In a note Mewaldt further supports his point by noting that the expression εἰκῆ τε καὶ ὡς ἔτυχε (“without plan and haphazardly”) which is used to describe human rearing of the young in the Precepts (Iambl. VP 213) also appears in Diotogenes (77.6 Thesleff). Once again, however, it is very unlikely that Diotogenes derived this phrase from the Precepts for three reasons. First, Diotogenes does not use the phrase in the passage about vines that Mewaldt cited as a parallel to the Precepts’ treatment of animals but in a different context. So we would have to suppose that Diotogenes read
the phrase in the context of animal-rearing in the Precepts but then did not use it in the supposed parallel passage about the rearing of vines but used it later in a different context. Second, Diotogenes, in fact, uses a slightly different expression by adding ἄπτο τῷ σῶματι. Third, the expression εἰκῆ τῇ καὶ ως ἔτυχε (minus the τε) is not unique to the Precepts but appears in several authors who are likely to have written before or at the same time (first century BC to first century AD) as Diotogenes (e.g., Chrysippus and Diodorus, see the commentary on fragment 9, line 171). Thus, the supposed close connection between Diotogenes and the Precepts evaporates upon closer examination.

Centrone notes four points in which he finds parallels between the Precepts and the pseudo-Pythagorean ethical treatises (1990: 38–41):

1. The divine does not neglect humanity but assists it and takes care of it.
2. The divine directs all things and man needs the supervision of the divine.
3. Rulers have in mind the good of their subjects.
4. The importance assigned to the concepts of τάξις and συμμετρία.

He is certainly right that each of these four points is found in both the Precepts and the pseudo-Pythagorean ethical treatises. This fact in itself, however, does not show that the pseudo-Pythagorean ethical treatises relied on the Precepts for these points, since all of these points can be found in texts other than the Precepts. As noted above the need for divine supervision of human beings was a common theme of discussion in the late fifth and fourth centuries appearing notably in Plato but also in Isocrates, Critias and Xenophon (see the commentary on fr. 8). Similarly the idea that rulers should have in mind the good of their subjects is found in Book 1 of the Republic and may, in fact, be the most common view in the Greek world, a view that the first book of the Republic suggests sophists such as Thrasytchus challenged. Finally, it is undoubtedly true that order and symmetry play a role in the Precepts but they are central in other texts as well, see Plato (e.g., Gorgias 503e–504d; Philebus 64e–65a), Aristotle (Metaph. 1078a36) and even Democritus (fr. 191). Thus, the emphasis on order and symmetry in the pseudo-Pythagorean writings need not be explained by reference to the Precepts.

Centrone tries to buttress these more general points with references to parallels in specific language between the Precepts and the pseudo-
Pythagorean ethical treatises, but for various reasons they do not succeed in demonstrating a connection between the *Precepts* and these treatises. Centrone (1990: 40) notes that pseudo-Hippodamus uses two verbs (ἐπιβλέπειν, ὀλιγωρεῖν) that are used in the *Precepts*’ assertion that we should suppose that the gods “oversee” and do not “neglect” human beings (fr. 8, line 7). This is certainly true, but pseudo-Hippodamus uses the verbs in a considerably different context. The passage in Hippodamus is not giving advice on how to act as the *Precepts* are, but rather describing the destructive views of the sophists who say that the gods do not pay attention to us and neglect us (101.27 Thesleff). The verbs are not in themselves rare, and since they appear in this quite different context in pseudo-Hippodamus, there is no reason to think that pseudo-Hippodamus was relying on the *Precepts* when writing this passage (for more on pseudo-Hippodamus see the commentary on fr. 8). Again Centrone notes that in fragment 5 of the *Precepts* the two verbs used when asserting that “to prize (ἀγαπᾶν) and love (στέργειν) customs and practices that are fine . . . is truly to be lovers of what is beautiful and fine” are also paired in pseudo-Metopos’ *On Virtue*. However, once again the verbs are used in a radically different context in pseudo-Metopos (117.5–7). In that passage pseudo-Metopos makes a distinction between three different elements of virtue: reason, power and choice. He then argues that it is characteristic of choice to love and enjoy (ἀγαπᾶν καὶ στέργειν), which thus belongs to both the rational and irrational part of the soul. None of these concepts are involved in fragment 5 of the *Precepts* and it seems very unlikely that pseudo-Metopos was thinking of the quite different passage in the *Precepts* when writing this section. Moreover, the two verbs in question are paired in other authors besides the *Precepts* before the likely date of pseudo-Metopos (e.g., Teles, Περὶ ἀπαθείας Ης Hense 1909: 57.6).

Before leaving the discussion of the relationship of the *Precepts* to the pseudo-Pythagorean literature, it is necessary to turn to the three-part treatise known as the *Tripartitum* (On Education, On Statesmanship and On Nature), which was composed before 200 BC and ascribed to Pythagoras himself (see Diog. Laert. 8.6–7 and Centrone 2014: 317). Zhmud regards the *Tripartitum* as relying on the *Precepts* (2012a: 72 n. 47) but does not present new arguments for this position, referring instead to Diels’ seminal article on the *Tripartitum* (1890: 465–7). Our primary source for the contents of the *Tripartitum* is Diogenes Laertius.
who provides an account of some of the contents of the three treatises (8.9–10). The material provided here in Diogenes is paralleled with only a few changes in Diodorus 10.9.3–5, which suggests that Diodorus too used the Tripartitum, although Zhmud suggests that the similarity is to be explained by both Diodorus and the Tripartitum using the Precepts (2012a: 72 n. 47). Thus it is important to consider in detail the connection between the Precepts and the Tripartitum and Diels’ arguments for that connection.

The most significant parallel between the texts is that Diodorus, Diogenes and the Precepts all divide human life into four ages (boy, young man, man and old man). There is a corruption of the text in both Diodorus and Diogenes so that two alternate terms for young man appear and the term for man falls out but otherwise the terminology is the same (see the commentary on fr. 2). Moreover, in Diogenes (but not Diodorus) the four ages are each identified as lasting twenty years, and, although in the section of the Precepts where the ages are set out this is not stated directly (fr. 2 lines 7–15, fr. 9 lines 14–41, 140), the Precepts do seem to be working on the assumption that the ages are twenty years in length as well (fr. 4 lines 8–10). There is thus a fairly specific parallel between the Precepts and the Tripartitum as reported by Diogenes but the significance of this parallel does not become clear until we examine both the broader context of the parallel passages in the Precepts and in the Tripartitum and also the broader discussion of age groups in the Greek world.

The agreement between the Tripartitum and the Precepts that human life is divided into four age groups of twenty years each becomes much less prominent in light of the fact that the postulation of age groups was widespread in Greek culture and that the division of human life into four ages was, in fact, the most widespread (for details see the commentary on fr. 2). For example, Xenophon identifies four age groups both in Sparta and also in Persia (Lac. 3.1ff.; Cyr. 1.2.4). Four age groups also appear in the Hippocratic corpus (e.g., Aph. 1.13). Most conspicuously of all, in the Hippocratic treatise On Regimen 1.33 there are four age groups with the exact same names as found in the Precepts. On Regimen does not specify that the four ages are twenty years each, so that this may remain a distinctive Pythagorean feature, but it should be clear that in adopting a four-fold division of ages the Tripartitum is not following an approach that is to be found only in the Precepts but rather one that is
widespread in Greek culture (for further discussion of the age groups in the Precepts and Greek culture see the commentary on fr. 2).

There are further grounds for doubt that the Tripartitum as reported by Diogenes and reflected in Diodorus drew on the Precepts for the four ages, since both Diogenes and Diodorus report important additional material that finds no parallel in the Precepts. Most significantly both draw a parallel between the ages of human beings and the seasons so that the child is equated with spring, the young man with summer, the man with fall and the old man with winter. There is no trace of this parallel in the Precepts, where the seasons are not mentioned. Moreover, this sort of comparison between the natural order and the life of man is alien to the straightforward style of the Precepts, which avoids such metaphor. Now, it could be that the later tradition took over the division of human life into four twenty-year parts from the Precepts and elaborated this with the parallel to the seasons so that the Precepts would still be the original source for the four ages. However, as we have seen, the division of human life into four parts is common in Greek thought as a whole and it would not be surprising if Pythagoreans other than the Pythagoreans of the Precepts had such a division. It is thus just as possible that this was a division of ages that was adopted by even earlier Pythagoreans than the fourth-century Pythagoreans of the Precepts and that the connection of the ages to the seasons was already present early in the tradition but dropped by the Pythagoreans of the Precepts. Indeed, Diels argues that the parallel between the four seasons and the ages of human life goes back to a supposed fifth-century Pythagorean poem, the Sacred Discourse (ἱερὸς λόγος), where the parallel with the seasons would indeed be more in place (1890: 465–6). Most scholars now doubt that such a poem existed in the fifth century and regard it as a later fabrication (Centrone 2014: 318), but this does not rule out the presence of the connection between the seasons and the ages of human beings in some other early Pythagorean source, which then is the source for the Tripartitum rather than the Precepts. Are there any more specific features of the passages that show that the Precepts must be the source of the Tripartitum?

Diels argues that the development of the ideas about sexuality that occur in the context of the four ages in the Tripartitum is similar to what is found in the Precepts and thus constitutes the evidence that the Tripartitum was relying specifically on the Precepts for its account of
the four ages (1890: 466; Schorn 2013 seems to follow Diels but gives no new arguments). However, close examination of the passages shows that the opposite conclusion is more likely to be true: the differences in the specifics of the treatment of sexuality suggest that the Tripartitum was not relying on the Precepts. In the passages in the Precepts where the four ages are mentioned there is no discussion of sexuality (fr. 2 and fr. 9, lines 14–41). However, in a separate passage it is asserted that the young should not practice sex and preferably not even know about it before the age of twenty (fr. 4, cf. fr. 9, 135–8). On the other hand the passage from the Tripartitum quoted by Diogenes and followed by Diodorus presents two precepts about sexuality immediately before the description of the four ages. Other than clearly wanting to put limits on sexuality there are no specific parallels between the precepts on sex in the Tripartitum and what is said on the topic in the Precepts. Thus, the Tripartitum says nothing about the Precepts’ prohibition on sex before twenty. On the other hand the Tripartitum urges that sex not be practiced at all in the summer and infrequently in the winter, while the Precepts make no connections between sex and the seasons. Similarly the Tripartitum reports an anecdote according to which Pythagoras was asked when one should engage in sex and replied “when you wish not to be master of yourself.” Nothing of this sort is found in the Precepts. Thus, pace Diels, the treatment of sexuality is not developed in similar ways in the Precepts and the Tripartitum and there is nothing to suggest that the comments on sexuality in the Tripartitum were derived from the Precepts.

We are left, then, with the one significant similarity between the Tripartitum and the Precepts, that both divide human life into ages that are twenty years long. The question is how to explain that similarity. The problem with explaining it by postulating that the Tripartitum derived its account of the divisions of human life from the Precepts is that all of the rest of the presentation of the four ages in the Tripartitum and the discussion of sexuality that precedes it find no parallel in the Precepts. So we would have to suppose that all this material was added by the Tripartitum from another source or that it was all in other parts of the Precepts that have not survived. These are possibilities but we have to make many fewer suppositions if we simply say that the Tripartitum drew on a different source or sources in which the parallel between the ages and the seasons was prominent. This source and hence the
Tripartitum might owe the idea that the ages are twenty years long to the Precepts or it might be that this was an idea developed early in the Pythagorean tradition which was later followed by the Precepts. In the first case the Precepts represent one relatively minor source for the Tripartitum, a source that was not used directly but rather that influenced the direct source of the Tripartitum, or in the second case the Precepts may have no influence at all on the Tripartitum.

In conclusion we can see that the Precepts exercised significant influence on Stobaeus, Iamblichus’ On the Pythagorean Way of Life and pseudo-Ocellus. Apart from that, the evidence for influence of the Precepts on the later Pythagorean tradition is very limited. One phrase in pseudo-Archytas is probably owed to the Precepts. The Precepts might be one source among many for a passage in Porphyry on the goals of human life, might be one source among many for pseudo-Zaleucus’ argument that people need to believe in the existence of the gods and might have indirectly influenced the Tripartitum’s division of human life into twenty-year periods. The fact is that the precepts which appear with great frequency in the later tradition in authors such as Diogenes Laertius, Porphyry and Diodorus show little evidence of deriving from the Precepts. Thus, Aristoxenus’ Pythagorean Precepts should not be regarded as some sort of Ur-text from which most later lists of precepts derive. Clearly a number of different sources lie behind those later lists. This makes a great deal of sense if we recognize that Aristoxenus’ Precepts were not an attempt to gather together all Pythagorean precepts known to Aristoxenus from all earlier and contemporary times and places but rather an attempt to reflect the precepts of a specific group of Pythagoreans from a specific time and place, i.e. the Pythagoreans around Xenophilus with whom Aristoxenus associated as a young man when he came to Athens and before he joined Aristotle’s school. The precepts of these Pythagoreans are remarkable for their coherence and rationality but are not full of memorable anecdote and clever phrases (although there are some of the latter) so that they were not a particularly favored source in the later doxographical tradition for Pythagoreanism.