

Victoria Lodge of Education and Research

650 Fisgard St, Victoria, B.C. Canada

Raphael and the School of Athens

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The School of Athens

They look to tired critics like mere busts
In galleries, but wittingly collected,
By bold anachronism resurrected,
This flesh so warm a skeptic almost trusts
The felt, unilateral fidelity
That framed them under the sky and vaulting roof:
The red – cloaked Heraclites still aloof,
Parmenides still pondering “to be,”
Young Aristotle marking out this world,
Old Plato pointing upward to the forms.
Behind them rise dear clouds, heartbreaking storms,
Lightning that Zeus and gray Jehovah hurled,
And from a corner, winkingly alive,
The face of Raphael at twenty five.

Anthony Lombardy

The Painter

Raffaello Sanzi was an Italian painter and architect of the Italian High Renaissance. Raphael was known for his Madonna's and large compositions in the Vatican in Rome. His paintings are admired for their clarity of form, ease of composition, and his visual achievement of the Neoplatonic idea of Human grandeur.

Raphael was born in 1483 in Urbino and died in 1520 in Rome. His father Giovanni Santi was the first to teach his son to paint. Giovanni was a man of culture who was in constant contact with the advanced artistic ideas current at the court of Urbino, and introduced Raphael to humanistic philosophy.

The painting

The School of Athens is a depiction of philosophy. The scene takes place in classical times; we observe this from the Architecture and the Garments of the characters. An entire cast has been created, some with speaking parts and others without. Those with speaking roles fulfill the requirement of being a master and representing each subject needed for a true philosophical debate. The two main figures Plato and Aristotle are shown in the centre, engaged in such a dialogue.

My intention this evening is two fold, firstly, to impress upon you the importance of studying the liberal arts and sciences, and secondly, to elucidate the Masonic lessons that are veiled within the School of Athens.

As an Entered Apprentice I recall standing in the North East corner listening to the charge of that degree, which was to study the liberal arts and sciences as may lie within the compass of my attainment. The characters within the school of Athens are not only worthy of discussion for their individual contributions as philosophers, mathematicians, astronomers, and so forth, but more specifically for the ways they enrich our Masonic teachings.

Plato

Plato was born in 427 BCE and died in 347 BCE giving him a nice round 80 years of life. The son of wealthy and influential parents, Plato began his philosophical career as a student of Socrates. After the

passing of his Master he traveled to Egypt and Italy. He studied with students of Pythagoras and spent several years advising the Royal Family of Syracuse.

Finally he returned to Athens and established his own school at the Academy. Plato endeavoured to teach both the heritage of a Socratic style of thinking as well as guiding his students through mathematical learning to the achievement of abstract philosophical truth.

In Raphael's painting Plato is having a philosophical debate with Aristotle. Both are at the centre with Plato raising his finger to the sky, holding one of his last dialogues in his hand *The Timaeus*.

The Timaeus is a dialogue between Socrates, Critias, Timaeus, and Hermocrates it contains cosmological speculations, the history of man, the location of Atlantis, as well as musical and mathematical theories. Since Plato encompasses the seven liberal arts and sciences I found him to be the perfect starting place for my studies in the liberal arts.

Aristotle

Aristotle was a scientist, astronomer, political theorist, and an inventor of what we today call symbolic or formal logic. His writings include biology, psychology, ethics, physics, metaphysics, and politics, even today his writings on justice are required for undergraduates reading law. After Aristotle died his works were lost for 200 years until they were rediscovered in Crete then translated into Latin by Boethius around 500 BCE. Aristotle was educated at Plato's Academy for 20 years; he began his education at the age of 17 and stayed until Plato's death. He taught philosophy completely different in method and content at his own institution called "The Lyceum", as compared to the way in which he received instruction from Plato. Aristotle always listened to both experts and commoners before defining his opinions for he believed that truth is found in both. He claimed that the natural function of man is to reason well and to reason in accordance with virtue. Does Aristotle have anything to do with Freemasonry to day, well let us recall the Master of a Lodge speaking after the Lodge is duly formed before he declares it opened and supplicates this blessing from the Grand Geometrician of the Universe; "May the rays of Heaven shed their benign influence upon us, and enlighten us in the paths of virtue and of science." I would argue that after seeing this picture of Raphael's with Aristotle carrying his book *Ethics* in which he speaks at length on virtue and uses science as proofs for his beliefs today's Mason will have much to learn from this wise Philosopher.

Xenophon

Xenophon was a Greek historian and philosophical essayist. He was born in Athens at about 430 BCE the son of Gryllus. It was in his early life that he first encountered and then was influenced by Socrates. It is written in a story by Diogenes that it was on a narrow street that Socrates meets Xenophon and asked him where food was sold. After this he asked him where people became fine and good. Xenophon did not know the answer and so Socrates told him to follow him and learn. Xenophon was the first to take notes and write of Socrates conversations. However Xenophon was more interested in a life of action than that of studying philosophy. So in 401 BCE he accepted an invitation from his friend Proxenus to take part in an expedition against Persia. Socrates advised Xenophon to travel to Delphi and consult with the Oracle prior to accepting this offer. Xenophon did so although he had already made up his mind. Xenophon is an interesting character and has many writings to his credit. One of them being *Cyropaedia* in which he expresses his own ideas on training and education. In this piece Xenophon appears to have written it to appose Plato's *Republic*. Most of his philosophy is a combination of teachings from Socrates and Spartan instruction. Why he is featured in the painting I find myself still searching. It does seem appropriate that he is placed in a discussion with Socrates and Alexander the Great, Although Aristotle was Alexander's teacher and not Socrates. I can only guess that the topic of conversation must be of a military nature.

Epicurus

Epicurus was born in Samos to a poor Athenian colonist; he was not of the upper class in wealth or title and suffered from poor health most of his life. His philosophy represents a creative blend of the metaphysical interests of the Pre-Socratic with the ethical concerns of Socrates. Many thought Epicurus to be a hedonist due to the emphasis he put on the pursuit of pleasure, however he was not condoning a promiscuous or decadent lifestyle as one stoic philosopher unjustly accused him. He did understand that a majority of the body's pleasures brought pain or painful consequences. With his poor health we should not be shocked to learn that a central theme in his philosophy is both prudence and temperance. He believed that wisdom was the greatest virtue and by employing wisdom we would learn which pleasures to participate in and which

ones to avoid. It was Epicurus belief that to be totally happy one must live a virtuous life, not just because it was a good thing to do, but that it would lead to consequences of pleasure therefore creating an absence of pain and fear. In the case of Epicurus I would like to suggest that through Masonic teachings we hope to take good men and make them better men, husbands, and fathers, thereby creating happiness in their homes, communities, and society. Epicurus teaches us that there are many pleasures a man can have in this world but only the ones acquired through a virtuous lifestyle will truly alleviate the pain and suffering of man there by creating true happiness in life.

Zeno

Zeno was an Eleatic Philosopher born about 488 BCE in Elea Italy. He was a disciple of Parmenides, not only one of his disciples but his favourite disciple. When Zeno had reached the age of forty he arrived in Athens with Parmenides and resided there for quite some time. I have learned that Zeno participated in Parmenides legislation which Elea's citizens yearly pledged themselves to follow by taking an oath. Zeno spent his whole time explaining and developing Parmenides philosophical system. From Plato we have learned that Parmenides was Zeno's senior by twenty five years. It is difficult to comment extensively on Zeno as only bits of his writing has survived, and what we do know about him comes from Aristotle in Physics, Book 6, Chapter 9. Zeno had two main arguments, the first of which contains paradoxes against multiplicity intent on showing that unlimited and or continuous, are not made up of smaller units in any greater number. Zeno's other main arguments centers on motion and proposes that time is no more a sum of moments that a line is a sum of points. For anyone wishing to understand the beginnings of space, time, and motion I strongly suggest reading this philosophers work. To this day no one has shown how to solve Zeno's paradoxes, however with today's science and mathematics we do know that Zeno's arguments were based on, as far as we see today, false assumptions. Today no Zeno paradox can be created within our current math and science. Surprisingly though it has taken individuals like Newton, Weirstrass, and Einstein to prove the difference in mathematics and to create the laws that prevent Zeno's paradoxes from continuing in our current philosophy's. Why should we as masons get to know Zeno? Well to understand his paradoxes we must learn mathematics and logical thought and these are definitely within the seven liberal arts and sciences that we profess to admire.

Averroes

Averroes was born in Cordova Spain to a family that had established a deep rooted tradition on the legal and public service. His Grandfather was the Chief Judge of Cordova during the Almoravid Dynasty. Averroes has a tradition education for his time and class, consisting of Haddith, Linguistics, Jurisprudence, and Scholastic Theology. One of the most interesting notes about Averroes was his knowledge of medicine. His book Generalities became one of the medical textbooks for physicians in and the Muslim world for centuries. It appears that Averroes main purpose for being placed in this fresco is to give credit to his influence in medicine, as well; he was the main Muslim philosopher to bring the teachings of Aristotle to the Muslim world. He was commissioned to explain Plato's Republic, Alexander's De Intellectu, the Metaphysics of Nicolas of Damascus, and the Almajest of Ptolemy. This work as well as his own writings on legal Methodology, Sacrifices, Land Taxes, Cleanliness, Marriage, Jihad, and Governments role with non Muslims, is a credit of over thirty years of work and study. It was Averroes hope to bring Napoleonic Interpretations of Aristotle to the Muslim world and to bring Muslims to what the Greek thinkers had originally intended to communicate in their own cities as how to live as a society. It was because of Averroes work that western intellectual interest was reinvigorated in Aristotle who had been ignored since the sixth century. Today we as intellectuals who study Aristotle and indeed even Aristotle himself have Averroes to thank for keeping his works alive.

Pythagoras

Pythagoras now this is a man that I truly find daunting. Just to have him in the fresco makes the study of it worthwhile. We as masons who pay homage to this great man by honouring our past masters with a jewel that depicts his greatest and most famous theorem as well we adorn our carpet with this symbol. A lifetime could be dedicated to the study of his contributions to mankind and I can only assume to our craft if we are to keep his theorem in such high regard. I do find it odd that one of the world's greatest men actually wrote nothing. A man surrounded by legend. He was born in 530 BCE in Samos then in Southern Italy he established a society that was at the same time a religious community and a scientific school. We are told he was a disciple of Anaximander and his Astronomy followed and developed that of his teachers. Pythagoras spoke of the world having three types of men; lovers of wisdom, lovers of honour, and lovers of

gain, or the doctrine of a tripartite soul, a belief of the early Pythagoreans. Even though most will now associate it with Plato. The Pythagoreans also believed in rebirth or transmigration. Plato makes reference to this when he argues that the things we perceive with the senses remind us of the things we knew when the soul was out of the body and could perceive reality directly. The Pythagoreans believed music and the composition of notes and harmonies were akin to the body and medicine, they believed all things are numbers or can be represented by numbers. As much as I would love to further discuss Pythagoras and all he contributed to the world I would like to point out the importance of his contributions to music. It is so important that Raphael has painted Pythagoras with one of his greatest achievements, the Diatessaron, and so I would like to draw our attention now to this most fascinating piece of work.

First I have to say that in the course of studying this particular part of the fresco I have found myself doing much reading on the diatessaron. I am not well versed as yet in the field of music and so have not been able to find a way in which to put this particular part into my own words. So instead of stumbling through a badly paraphrased explanation I am going to ask that you allow me to quote from a website that I found to assist me in this endeavour. The site is called The Pythagorean Theory of Music and Color and I have included it in the notes at the end of my piece.

One day while meditating upon the problem of harmony, Pythagoras chanced to pass a brazier's shop where workmen were pounding out a piece of metal upon an anvil. By noting the variances in pitch between the sounds made by large hammers and those made by smaller implements, and carefully estimating the harmonies and discords resulting from combinations of these sounds, he gained his first clue to the musical intervals of the diatonic scale. He entered the shop, and after carefully examining the tools and making mental note of their weights, returned to his own house and constructed an arm of wood so that it: extended out from the wall of his room. At regular intervals along this arm he attached four cords, all of like composition, size, and weight. To the first of these he attached a twelve-pound weight, to the second a nine-pound weight, to the third an eight-pound weight, and to the fourth a six-pound weight. These different weights corresponded to the sizes of the braziers' hammers.

Pythagoras thereupon discovered that the first and fourth strings when sounded together produced the harmonic interval of the octave, for doubling the weight had the same effect as halving the string. The tension of the first string being twice that of the fourth string, their ratio was said to be 2:1. By similar experimentation he ascertained that the first and third string produced the harmony of the diapente, or the interval of the fifth. The tension of the first string being half again as much as that of the third string, their ratio was said to be 3:2. Likewise the second and fourth strings, having the same ratio as the first and third strings, yielded a diapente harmony. Continuing his investigation, Pythagoras discovered that the first and second strings produced the harmony of the diatessaron, or the interval of the third; and the tension of the first string being a third greater than that of the second string, their ratio was said to be 4:3. The third and fourth strings, having the same ratio as the first and second strings, produced another harmony of the diatessaron. The second and third strings had the ratio of 8:9. The key to harmonic ratios is hidden in the famous Pythagorean tetractys, or pyramid of dots. The tetractys is made up of the first four numbers--1, 2, 3, and 4--which in their proportions reveal the intervals of the octave, the diapente, and the diatessaron. While the law of harmonic intervals as set forth above is true, it has been subsequently proved that hammers striking metal in the manner described will not produce the various tones ascribed to them. In all probability, therefore, Pythagoras actually worked out his theory of harmony from the monochord--a contrivance consisting of a single string stretched between two pegs and supplied with movable frets. As much as I would love to completely immerse into this topic I am sure that we can all see now that the Diatessaron could be an entire education piece, and it goes into many levels of application. Its ratios are used in architecture, the sounds of spheres, the entire harmony of the heavens, and even in the understanding of color, and as we have noted from the Pythagoreans it also has medical healing principles that are true and proven even in our current society. This tablet that he is working from is a very important part of the painting. The fact that the artist has shown it to us and not held it with its back to the viewer is telling us to look at it and to get to know it. I strongly encourage you all to investigate this very important tablet as all harmony is contained in its laws and if ever we are to lose harmony in a lodge it will be the laws of Pythagoras that will expel the inharmonic or the evil and return us into harmony with the Grand Geometrician.

Parmenides

Parmenides was born around 510 BCE at Elea in Lower Italy. He was a Greek philosopher and poet born into a prominent family and was considered to be the chief representative of Eleatic philosophy. The citizens of Elea admired Parmenides for his legislation to which they credited the cities wealth and prosperity. We are taught that he was a disciple of Xenophanes. Parmenides did not agree with the philosophy of Heraclitus and wrote in opposition to him frequently. As we have been hearing it is no surprise that little remains of Parmenides work. One of the things we do know is that he stopped in Athens during his sixty – fifth year and spent time getting to know a young Socrates during the middle of the fifth century. His style is reflective of Hesiod and Orphics. It was the Pythagoreans that expressed the magnitude of thought from the development of mathematics. To the Supreme mathematician it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be, Parmenides begins with this principle. It is impossible to think what is not, and it is impossible for what cannot be thought to be. The real question is it or is it not? Is therefore equivalent to the question, can it be thought or not? This creates two thoughts. First truth, and second the world of illusion, or the world of the senses and interpretations of man due to the senses. Parmenides teaches that truth is found in our thought that existence is, and inaccuracy from the thought that non-existence can also be. Surprisingly Parmenides is not in favour of the Pythagorean theory of a discontinuous reality, which I suspected he would as he does support most of the Pythagorean philosophy of mathematics. Why do I want to talk about Parmenides this evening? Well to illustrate how a philosopher uses geometry to argue his thoughts. For Parmenides is recorded as saying space is infinite which is to say that it cannot be in one direction any more than in another, and the sphere is the only figure of which this can be said.

Brethren, Raphael's school of Athens is an incredible painting. Tonight we have looked at but a few of these great philosophers and if we were to investigate them all I am sure that the evening would continue on until my home would not be a place of welcome. I can tell you that in the course of preparing for this presentation I have already pushed this possibility more than once, and so I would like to proceed to introduce you to the rest of the characters in this fresco before I quote from our own lessons to help bring clarity to why we are looking at this painting.

The rest of the cast then is Heraclitus, Diogenes, Euclid, and of course Euclid using both points of the compass, Zoroaster and Ptolemy holding the earth and celestial globes, Raphael the painter placing himself in the fresco for a cameo appearance, and of course Socrates.

During the charge at passing we are told: The Study of the liberal arts, that valuable branch of education which tends so effectually to polish and adorn the minds, is earnestly recommended to your consideration; especially the science of geometry which is established as the basis of our art. Geometry or Freemasonry, originally synonymous terms, being of a divine and moral nature, is enriched with the most useful knowledge; while it proves the wonderful properties of nature, it demonstrated the more important truths of morality.

I would like to now draw your attention now to the fresco as a whole. I would like to point out some of the things that I have an interest in now that we are better acquainted with some of the characters and therefore more aware of the conversations that must be taking place. As I mentioned before Socrates is having a conversation with Alexander the Great, Xenophon, Alcibiades another general who had his life saved by Socrates during the battle of Potidaea, and who then stayed to protect Socrates life at Delium during the retreat, and also Aeschines an Athenian orator who became powerful in politics, and a man who appears to be a Greek commander, all in a discussion with a page rushing into the scene with what appears to be a scroll and a book of some importance to the conversation, as he is being summoned to bring them to the group. If only we could be a fly on the wall. The next thing I would like to point out for discussion is Parmenides resting his foot on the rough ashlar and Heraclitus resting against the perfect ashlar. Now for those who may not know Heraclites philosophy it is said that he wrote in a style very similar to Lao Tzu, a Chinese philosopher from 600 BCE. Now Lao Tzu translates into the Old Master. I would have to say that only the Old Master would have the right to work upon the perfect ashlar. We also have Diogenes lying on the steps close to the centre of the painting. This must be a place of importance for Raphael to place him here. For those who are familiar with Diogenes they will know that he lived in a barrel and lead the simplest of lives. Two stories of Diogenes come to mind; once Alexander the Great went to him and asked if he was the one they called Diogenes the philosopher and he replied that he was. Alexander hearing stories of the way he lived his life as a philosopher not wanting from society having been born in wealth

but choosing to live in a barrel offered him anything that was within his kingdom, to this Diogenes replied that all he wanted was for Alexander to move a little to the left or right as he was blocking the sun. He is featured in the fresco with his famous cup for the other story goes that he once went to the public fountain with his cup to get a drink of water and observed a child using his hands in the form of a cup to take a drink, to this he said, how foolish am I that I have been out done in simplicity by a child and threw away his cup. I would like to suggest to you that if we were to reflect on the charity lesson of an entered apprentice we can recall how we were all received into freemasonry poor and penniless neither naked nor clothed neither barefoot nor shod, I would also like to point out that when asked to describe the mode of our preparation? We all answered my right arm left breast and right knee were made bare and my right heel was made slip shod. Although he is not wearing shoes I would like to point out that he is the only character to resemble this peculiar mode of dress. Next if we could look at the right hand corner of the painting we see Zoroaster and Ptolemy holding the celestial and earth globes as seen on the pillars in our own temple. Now if we look just down from the globes as we saw earlier Euclid using both points of the compass to me this is truly the action of a master. Finally Brethren I would like you all to imagine a centre line drawn down the middle of this painting. There are only two things that touch the centerline and that is the corner of the perfect ashlar and if you look at the pictures that I gave you there is a square leaning against the perfect ashlar. The centerline cuts directly through the centre of the square, but wait we do have a problem because the picture that hangs in the library of the Provincial Legislature is missing the square. Now why is the one in the Legislature missing such an important piece of symbolism? Only two tools are presented in this fresco and they are the square and the compass, symbols of a very ancient and honourable fraternity indeed.

There is much more left to discuss, but it will have to be at another time. When I started this journey, and now I understand that I am still at the start, I spoke with a monk who lived in Rome for 15 years studying and asked him if I could show him the painting so that he could share with me his thoughts about it. He looked at me and smiled before saying, "James you have no idea what you are looking at and the importance of it. Go and learn about it on your own for awhile before you come to me, otherwise my talking to you will be a waste of time." This fresco is painted on the wall of the Pope's private study in Rome and was painted at the same time as the Sistine Chapel, it took over a year to complete and I am sure that only the Pope at that time could have financed such a project. I hope that one day we will again commission someone to paint our history and that we will have characters of such magnitude to justify the beauty and knowledge that Raphael has captured in his School of Athens.



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