Codes and Messages in the Paintings of Raphael

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2018

Introduction

Over the past five hundred years Raphael's painting the *School of Athens* has been subjected to analysis by a number of interpreters starting with Raphael's contemporary, the painter Giorgio Vasari, to theologians art historians classics scholars and travellers (Hall 1997, Smolizza 2007). There has scarcely been a consensus about the identity of many of the characters portrayed in the work. In this article I would like to shine a fresh light on the masterpiece by applying the key ideas and philosophical framework of angeletic hermeneutics, a discipline developed by Rafael Capurro since the late 1990's and formulated in our publication "Messages and Messengers' in 2012 (Capurro & Holgate 2012). In angeletics there is explanatory power in the dynamic interplay between Code (laws, social rules, accepted doctrines) and Message (individual expression, new idea, personal belief). Within aesthetic experience there is often a creative tension between the social, religious or political interpretation of a work and the artist's personal vision, his or her 'message'. It is this code/meaning interplay I wish to explore in the paintings of Raphael, particularly in his *School of Athens.* This enigmatic painting should be viewed not as a two-dimensional snapshot of famous personages from Renaissance and Antiquity but more like a piece of live theatre where the gestures, postures, costumes and unspoken dialogues need to be carefully understood in the context of Raphael's world. In his 'Raphael's Poetics. Art and Poetry in High Renaissance Rome' David Rijser (Rijser, 2012) referred to the 'splendid tricks of illusionism' by which 'Raphael has made his groups interact with each other and the viewer in spectacular ways…He makes them come alive, articulates and joins separate groups gently and unobtrusively towards a single whole which is yet made out of diverse, individual parts…The many figures pointing out or reaching over parapets etc. are intended to connect the pictorial space with the real space, not just for fun, but with an essential message: the virtual figures are 'here' 'now', to be conversed with, to challenge and question.' Let us now converse with, challenge and question those characters who have beguiled and intrigued us over the past five centuries.

The Anaxagoras Group

1.Gorgias of Leontini 2. Diagoras of Melos 3. Critias of Athens 4. Aeschines 5. Pericles 6. Xenophon 7. Thrasymachus of Chalcedon 8. Alcibiades 9. Anaxagoras of Clazomenae

Diagoras of Melos (5th cn. B.C.E.) – the arrival of the messenger

Diagoras is welcomed back to Athens by Critias, one of the Thirty Tyrants who banished him in 415 B.C. Behind the arriving messenger Gorgias, the founder of Sophism, touches his cap as if saluting his return while to the right Aeschines, the soldier-orator, gives him an encouraging wave. The scroll under Diagoras's arm represents his lyrical poetry while the two codices may refer to his published work *Apopyrgizontes Logos*. These documents support his case against the injustice of his banishment and are to be submitted to Alcibiades standing with the group of soldier-philosophers around the figure of Anaxagoras who is gesturing with his hands. Below Diagoras is the wreathed head of his teacher Democritus who once bought him out of slavery.

Diagoras the Melian was a lyric poet who was originally banned from Athens around 415 B.C. and who had a price placed on his head for destroying the herms and attacking the Eleusinian mysteries (Romer 1996, Winiarczyk 2016). He espoused the philosophy of *atheo*s after a rival poet plagiarised his work and was wrongly acquitted for it in court. His atheism may also have been a result of the unjust slaughter of the Melians in 416 B.C. Raphael's interest in and identification with the figure of Diagoras could be linked to his own atheism (as claimed first by Vasari in his biography) as a result of the premature deaths of his mother father and sister when he was a small boy in Urbino. The issue of plagiarism is also a matter they had in common. The demystification of sacred ritual which we see in Raphael's later paintings (particularly *La Disputa* and the *Mass at Bolsena*) finds a counterpart in Diagoras's attempts to desacralise Orphic beliefs in the gods and substitute nature and reason – a philosophy initiated by his teacher Democritus and after him by the Sophists and Socrates himself. The Derveni Papyrus, possibly the oldest extant work of Greek philosophy, is ascribed to Diagoras and Heraclitus. In his writings he elaborated his hermeneutic deconstruction of the Eleusinian Mysteries and Hieros Logos and expounded his Apopyrgizontes Logos (Janko 2001).

Apopyrgizontes Logos versus Hieros Logos: Iconoclastic atheism against Sacred Legend

With scroll and books tucked under his arm Diagoras represents the transforming mission of *angelos* at work in the Renaissance theatre of knowledge and anticipates our own electronic age. Diagoras's *Apopyrgizontes Logos* ('breaking down of towers') offered a heteronomic alternative to *Hieros Logos*. With the rise of the codex, the Gospels and holy scripture in Christianity during the Middle Ages and Renaissance as an autonomic dialogue between Man and God, the Orphic tradition of the scroll and the personally inscribed message emerging from the Sybilline discourse vanished. Original messaging (*angelia*) yielded to the copy, the codified message of the printed publication. Writing became fixed text in the hands of Roman priests, medieval monks and the Gutenberg press. Cadmus had triumphed over Orpheus. With the rise of the Information Age and the *Logos Informaticus* of the world of computation we are witnessing a return to Sybilline discourse where the modality of the printed book is giving way to digital texts and e-readers; letters and diaries yield to email and blogging; the page and pen are replaced by the screen and mouse, the tablet and stylus; icons and brands are ousting metaphor and symbol; scrolling and searching have taken over from reading and browsing. The hieratic Orphic gods have returned as the all-powerful deities of digital transhumanism in the guise of Turing and Kurzweill, Gates and Jobs, Brin Page and Zuckerberg. The mortals now worship at the virtual sacred sites of Microsoft, Apple, Google and Facebook. The launch of a new product by 'the Industry' is akin to the ancient pronouncements of the Delphic oracle. Logos has been reduced to the logo and the algorithm. The *School of Athens* celebrates the rise of the book culture with many of the characters in the scene holding reading or writing on significant books representing the values of individualism, liberalism, libraries and the right to self-expression which have been the cornerstone of educated democratic life since the Renaissance. That book culture and its inherent values are now threatened by digital technologies whose reader interface is the screen rather than the page.

Gorgias of Leontini 'The Nihilist' (c. 485– c. 380 B.C.E.)

Gorgias was the father of rhetoric (*technê*). His message is about language and the power (*dunamis*) of words to persuade, like a magical incantantion: “Just as different drugs draw forth different humors from the body – some putting a stop to disease, others to life – so too with words: some cause pain, others joy, some strike fear, some stir the audience to boldness, some benumb and bewitch the soul with evil persuasion” (Plato Gorgias 32). His lost work *On Nature or the Non-Existent* with its ontological scepticism (‘nothing exists and even if something did exist it could not be known and even if it can be known it cannot be communicated’) refutes Parmenides’ notion of Being. His nihilism and criticism of the Eliatics matches the instinctive nihilism of Diagoras the Melian – hence the encouraging salute to the arriving messenger he gives here in the *School of Athens*. His Renaissance avatar may be Raphael’s mentor during his formative years in Perugia – the painter Pinturicchio).

Critias of Athens (460-403 B.C.E.) as Cardinal Marsilio Ficino

Figure of Critias in the *School*

Ferrucci’s bust of Cardinal Ficino

Critias was one of the Thirty Tyrants who originally banned Diagoras from Athens and placed a price on his head for his atheism, his destruction of the herms and his attack on the Eleusinian mysteries around 415 B.C. Critias’s message was that ‘Religion is a deliberate imposture devised by some cunning man for political ends.’ Cardinal Marsilio Ficino was the founder of the New Academy and the most influential humanist philosopher of the Renaissance. His major work was *Theologia Platonica de immortalitate animae* and he was

an apologist for Neoplatonism and astrology. He wrote in 1492: “This century, like a golden age, has restored to light the liberal arts, which were almost extinct: grammar, poetry, rhetoric, painting, sculpture, architecture, music… this century appears to have perfected astrology." Ficino was a secret worshipper of Apollo and prayed each day facing the sun. The proximity of the frieze of the god may have been a reference to this by Raphael.

Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (499-428 B.C.E.)

From *Nuremberg Chronicle* (1493)

The name Anaxagoras means 'Master of the Field'. His message was *nous* (mind). Notice here his characteristic pointing gesture with the left hand. This is not Socrates pedantically ‘ticking off points’, as the nineteenth century art historian J. D. Passavant suggested (Passavant 1876), but Anaxagoras (Bell 1995) demonstrating to his group of soldier philosophers that man is the most intelligent of animals because he has hands – a human being is a creature with a mind and ten fingers. The attribution of the famous Socratic stub nose to Anaxagoras may well have been a piece of mischievous trickery, Raphael’s little visual joke, that has managed to dupe his audience for nearly half a millennium.

Anaxagoras as Niccolo Machiavelli

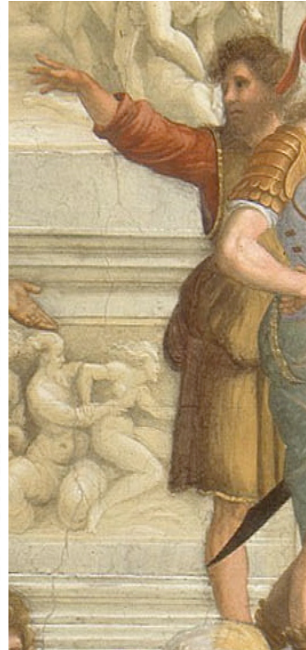
Bust of Machiavelli in Palazzo Vecchio Florence

Anaxagoras appears as Machiavelli lecturing his Prince (compare the ears and forehead). Machiavelli dedicated *Il Principe* (*The Prince*) to Lorenzo Piero di Medici, the son of

Lorenzo the Magnificent. The content was circulated in correspondence around 1513 (when Raphael was working on the *School*) but it was published in 1532. During his career Machiavelli had close relationships with Piero, Maximilian I of Bavaria and Cesare Borgia. He was also an admirer of the Duke of Urbino, Federico da Montefeltro. For him they were the Philosopher Kings of the Renaissance to whom he would bring his message.

Anaxagoras lecturing Pericles as Machiavelli teaching his Prince

Aeschines of Athens (390- c.314 B.C.E.) as Count Baldassare Castiglione



Aeschines Castiglioni (Raphael's portrait of 1514)

Aeschines, like Count Baldassare Castiglione, was a soldier, orator and diplomat. Here he welcomes Diagoras into the circle of the Sophists just as Castiglione introduced a youthful

Raphael to the world of the Ciceronian Humanist in Urbino and later in Rome. It is his *angelia* of 'the honest man' (*il cortegiano*) which the arriving messenger is now bringing to the school of Renaissance humanism. Castiglione's work The Book of the Courtier(*Il Cortegiano*) (written around 1508) became one of the most influential and widely read books produced by the Renaissance (Burke 1995). Castiglione's ideal of the educated and enlightened gentleman and his notion of *sprezzura* (a natural ease and spontaneity of expression) applied particularly to the life and art of Raphael himself.

Piero di Lorenzo de Medici (Piero the Unfortunate) as Pericles (c. 495–429 B.C.E.)

Pericles of Athens

Piero the Unfortunate

The fay stance in contrapposto reveals a pseudo-Pericles. On Piero's breastplate appears the emblem of Florence with the marzocco (the Medici lion) and *il giglio* (fleur-de-lys) and on his advancing right leg a leonine likeness of his father, Lorenzo the Magnificent. Piero was allegedly responsible for the deaths by poisoning of the two brilliant young Renaissance scholars Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Angelo Ambrogini (Poliziano) in 1494. (Slattery 2015)

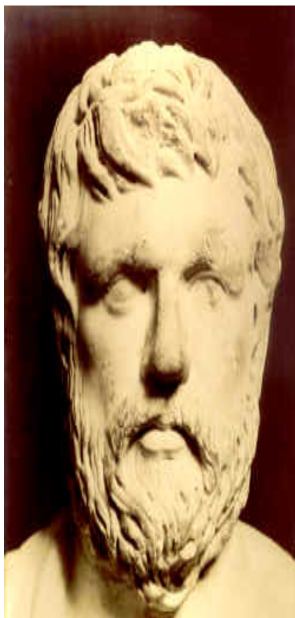
Lorenzo the Magnificent

Donatello's Marzocco in Florence

Anamorphically concealed on his retreating left leg, however, is the image of a domestic cat.

Piero the Unfortunate was not a true Son of the Marzocco. He drowned in the Garagliano River fleeing from battle while serving with the French army of Charles VIII in 1503.

Xenophon of Athens (430–354 B.C.E.) as Federico da Montefeltro of Urbino



Xenophon

Piero della Francesca's portrait of Federico da Montefeltro (1472)

Xenophon was a major influence on the thought of Machiavelli and was also the favourite Greek philosopher of Federico da Montefeltro of Urbino. Federico himself was greatly admired by Machiavelli as a model of the enlightened Prince. The bridge of Federico's nose was severed by an arrow in battle and we can see this feature in Raphael's painting. The stovepipe hat was a feature of English Renaissance fashion and was a forerunner of the top hat. Federico's affinity with Henry the Seventh and England is reflected in his headgear.

Thrasymachus of Chalcedon (c. 459– c. 400 B.C.)

Thrasymachus Emperor Maximilian 1

We notice the anamorphic Gothic 'm' in the hair and his cloak of Habsburg black. Equating Maximilian with Thrasymachus, the bombastic 'might is right' Sophist, is an ironic comment. Maximilian was on occasions less than 'fierce' and was criticised by Machiavelli in 'The Prince' as a negative model of leadership. His relationship with Pope Julius II, Raphael's patron, was ambiguous.

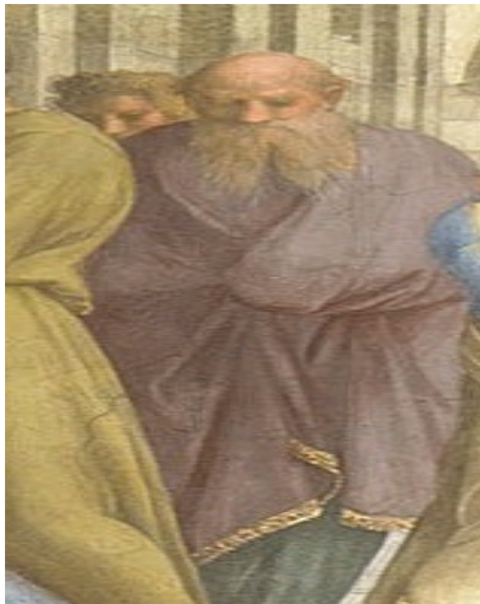
Alcibiades (450–404 B.C.) as Cesare Borgia

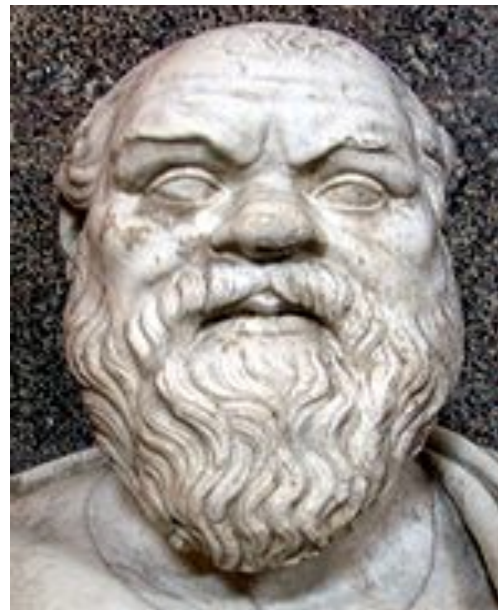
Alcibiades Cesare Borgia

There are interesting parallels between the lives of these two controversial figures – they were both boyishly handsome, cruel, devious and sexually erratic. Both came from dominant wealthy families – the Alcmaonidae and the Borgias – and were strongly influenced by their mothers. In the *School* Alcibiades is glancing over the shoulder of Anaxagoras towards his teacher Socrates – possibly to gauge his reaction to the atheistic message brought by Diagoras. Socrates too had rejected all gods. Reportedly he had saved Alcibiades' life at the Battle of Potidaea in 432 B.C. Alcibiades appears in several of Plato's Socratic Dialogues –

notably the Symposium and Protagoras – which document both his libertine life style and his eloquence as 'the prince of talkers'. Here in The School we notice that Cesare's left hand is almost claw-like and extends towards Federico. Could this be a veiled reference to his sequestration of Urbino and the exile of Federico's son Guidobaldo in 1502? In fact the little finger is clearly missing – which may indicate a defect of character according to the hand philosophy of Anaxagoras.

Socrates (470-399 B.C.)





Bust of Socrates in the Vatican Museum

Socrates with eyes lowered but facing us squarely and dressed in a purple robe stands between the school of the Sophists, atheists and orators (representing *pathos* and the rhetoric arm of the Trivium) and Plato's cenacle (*logos*/dialectic) with Aristotle and his entourage on the right representing *ethos*. Next to him is Anaxagoras and behind him is possibly Archelaus - both philosophers were former teachers of Socrates. As Rafael Capurro observes "The philosopher is a messenger that passes on (*dia*) ideas through the medium of the critical and autonomous *logos* instead of proclaiming a mythical truth coming from above." (Capurro 2012). For him Socrates was the embodiment of *angelos* and affirmed through his enquiring spirit and ethical Being a secular heteronomic world.

Socrates as Marco Fabio Calvus

Marco Fabio Calvus of Ravenna (1440-1527) was a Pythagorean ascetic and a translator of Hippocrates whom Raphael greatly respected as a father figure and whom he once accommodated at his home. Calvus, with his knowledge of Greek history and sculpture, was a major source of information for Raphael and shared a vision of the recreation of ancient Rome. His stoic lifestyle, his commitment to artistic truth and even the manner of his death during the Sack of Rome in 1527 endowed Fabio with a Socratic aura. This portrait is Raphael's homage to his friend and mentor. Mirandola's idea of statue animation or *telestike* ('statues ensouled and conscious') and the bringing to life of antiquity through theurgic ritual

matches Raphael's exploration of antique sculpture with Fabio Calvus and Pietro Bembo. The features of many philosophers depicted in the *School* are derived largely from statues as few texts from Greek antiquity had been handed down to Renaissance scholars from the Middle Ages. Raphael reportedly sent some of his students to Greece on an expedition to record features of antique sculptures not accessible to him otherwise.

Plato's Group

1. Archelaus 2. Socrates 3. Crates 4. Polemo 5. Xenocrates 6. Speusippus 7. Axiothea of Phlius 8. Plato

Plato (424-348 B.C.E.) as Leonardo da Vinci

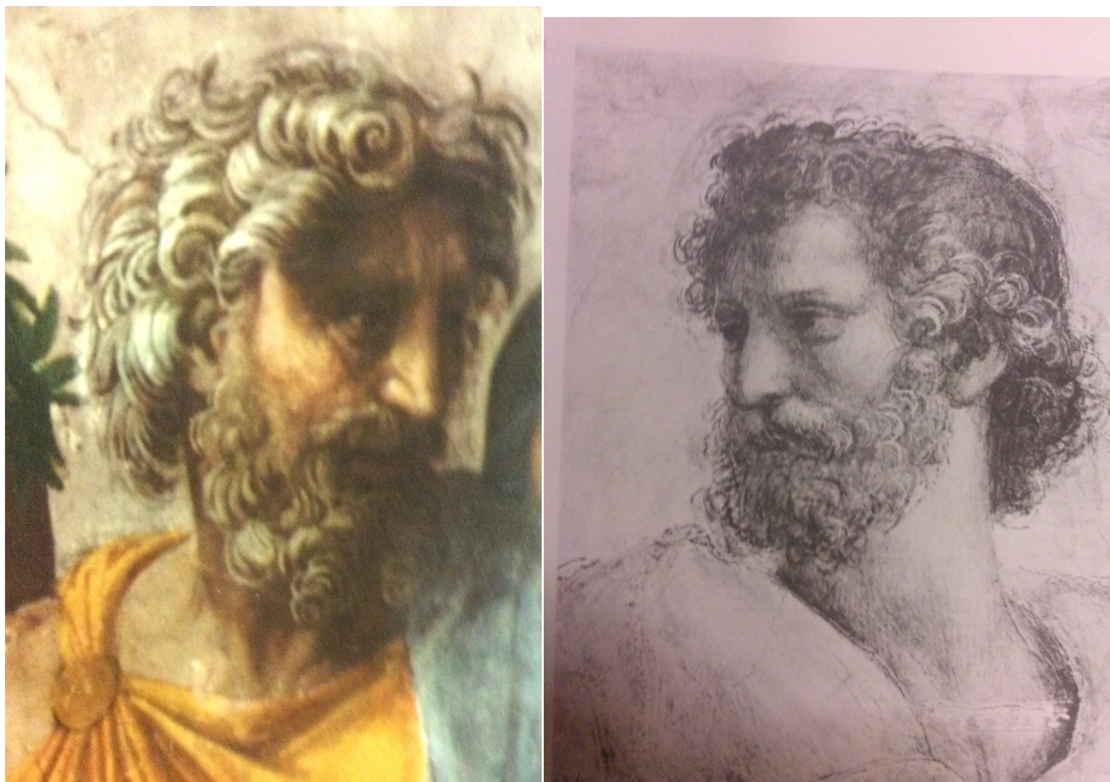
Plato   Da Vinci's self portrait   Statue of Da Vinci

The German art historian Herman Grimm in his *Das Leben Raphaels* (1872) identified this figure as St Peter and that of Aristotle as St. Paul. However, more recent opinion supports the view that Plato is depicted here and endowed with the likeness of Leonardo Da Vinci. Aristotle is portrayed next to him resembling the architect Donato Bramante (1444-1514), Raphael's close friend. The rivalry between Plato and Aristotle reflects also the artistic

differences between Leonardo and Bramante which began when they worked together on the Cathedral of Milan under Duke Ludovico Sforza. Bramante's presence also expresses the strong influence in the Vatican of the Umbrian school of painting, writing and architecture - represented in the *School* by portraits of Castiglione, Perugino and Raphael himself.

Bust of Aristotle   Younger Bramante

The Aristotle/Bramante doubling in the School is mirrored in La Disputa where Bramante appears in the bottom left of the painting with the group of heretics but also in the right hand corner near Dante – again as Aristotle. The brooch on the latter's tunic bears a representation of a drawing compass and he is accompanied by a young man wearing the cap of a builder's apprentice, complementing the figure of the youth looking over Bramante's shoulder in the left foreground.



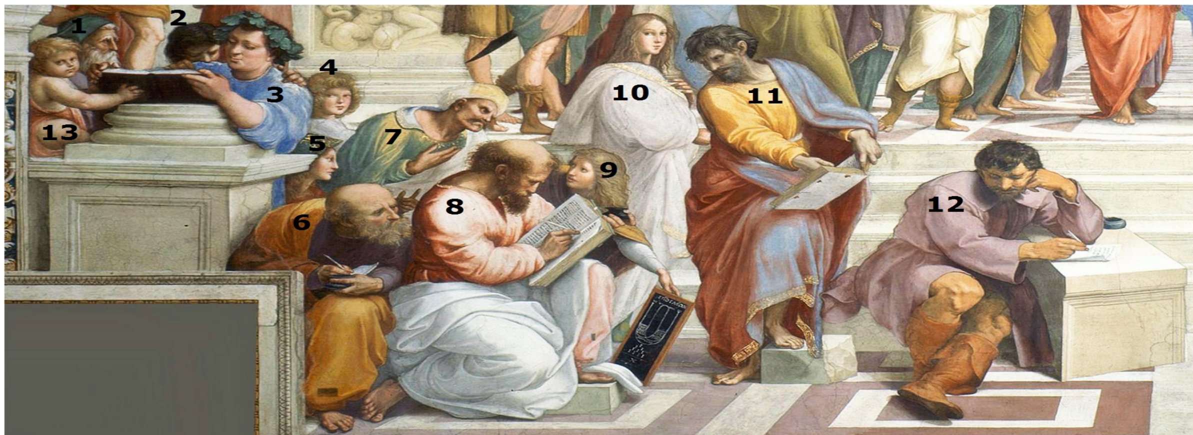
Aristotle/Bramante in *La Disputa*   Aristotle/Bramante in the *School of Athens*

The Scholarchs

The scholarchs of the Old Academy on Plato's right react to the dispute between Plato Aristotle Zeno and Chrysippus. Speusippus (6), Plato's nephew and head of the Second Academy, had questioned the universality of the Platonic forms in favour of a more relativistic philosophy, closer to the Stoics. Speusippus was, according to Diogenes Laertius, a womaniser and Raphael has placed beside him the female philosopher Axiothea of Phlius (7) who cuddles up to him supportively. Next to Speusippus, his rival and successor Xenocrates (5) gestures towards Zeno, his pupil, and leans against Polemo (4), later head of the Third Academy, who is seeking an explanation from his teacher. Polemo has his arm around his eromenos, Crates of Athens (3), whose wealthy background is emphasised by his leggings and aristocratic attire. He became scholarch after Polemo in 270 B.C.

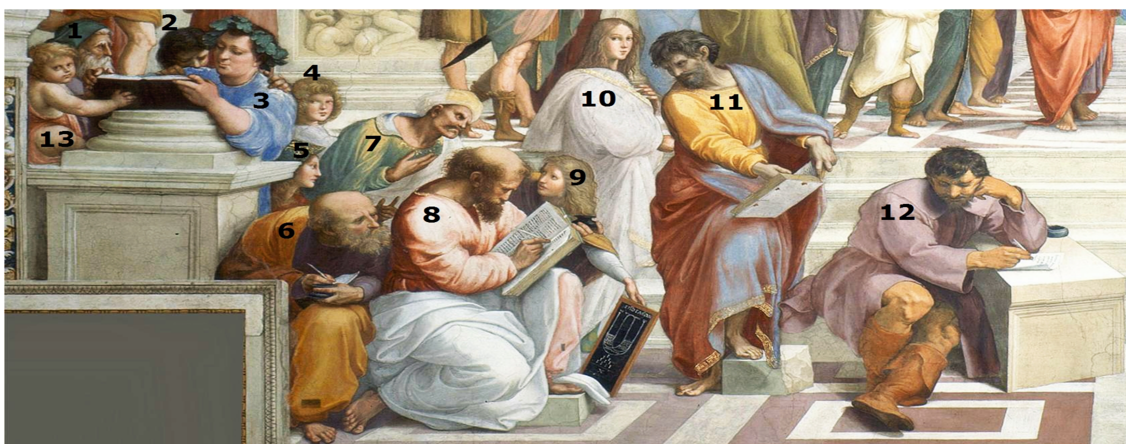
The Pythagoras Group – Raphael's Triple Play

The Greek Antiquity view



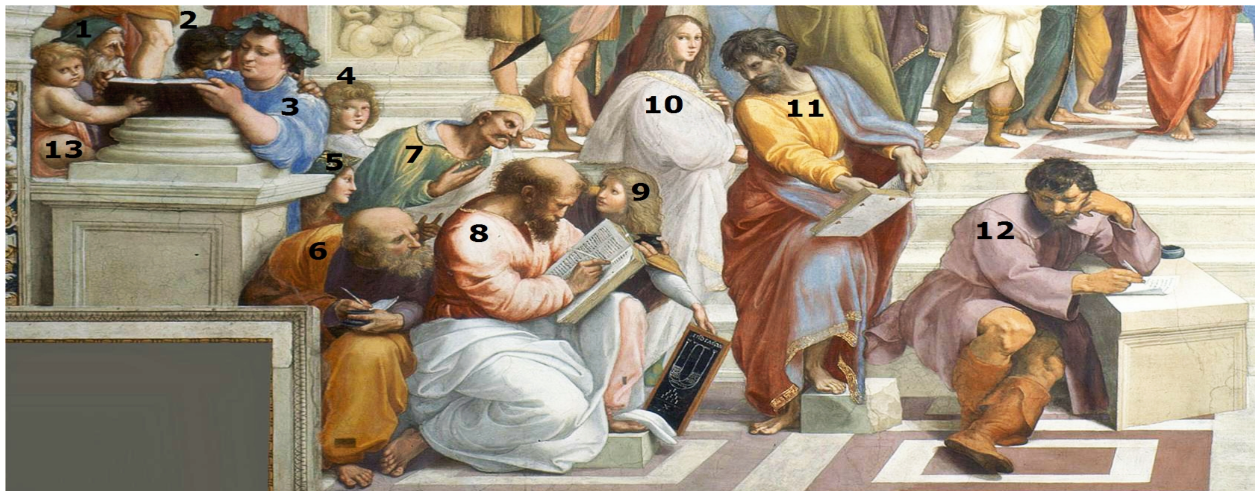
1. Heraclitus 2. Leucippus 3. Democritus 4. Telauges (son of Pythagoras, as a child) 5. Theano (wife of Pythagoras) 6. Empedocles 7. Averroes 8. Pythagoras of Samos 9. Telauges (his son) 10. Hypatia of Alexandria 11. Philolaus of Croton 12. Protagoras of Abdera 13. Telauges (as a baby)

The Pythagoras Group - Christianity view



1. Joseph 2. Theophilus 3. St Luke 4. Jesus (as a child) 5. Mary 6. St Mark 7. Balthazar 8. St Matthew 9. The Boy Jesus displaying a representation of the menorah from Luke 2: 42-51 - the Finding in the Temple incident 10. Jesus risen 11. St John 12. St Paul 13. Jesus (as a baby)

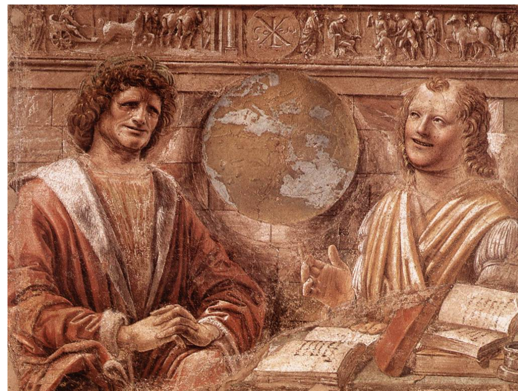
The Pythagoras Group - Renaissance view



1. Giovanni Santi 2. Timiteo Viti 3. Tommaso Inghirami 4. Raphael (as a child) 5. Magia Santi 6. Ludovico Ariosto 7. Elias del Medigo 8. Michaelangelo 9. Raphael (as a youth) 10. Raphael (as a young man) 11. Johannes Reuchlin 12. Michaelangelo 13. Raphael (as a baby)

Heraclitus of Ephesus

Heraclitus (the Weeping Philosopher) and Democritus (the Laughing Philosopher)



Bramante's *Heraclitus and Democritus* (1477)

Heraclitus (c. 535– c. 475 B.C.) as Joseph as Giovanni Santi

Raphael's *Presentation in the Temple*

Santi's *Man of Sorrows*

Raphael's father Giovanni Santi appears as Joseph several times in his son's early work, together with a likeness of Magia Santi as the Virgin Mary. In his own paintings Giovanni often portrayed Christ as the 'man of sorrows' - possibly an expression of grief over the early loss of his beloved Magia. Heraclitus of Ephesus was often described as 'The Weeping Philosopher' because of his pessimistic view of the world as a source of change and strife.

Leucippus (5th cn. B.C.E.) as Theophilus as Timiteo Viti

Leucippus Timoteo Viti Self Portrait

Leucippus was an Ionian philosopher of the fifth century B.C. who founded atomistic determinism. He was the teacher of Democritus and a contemporary of Empedocles. His best known works were *Megas Diakosmos* (The Great Cosmos) and *Peri Nou* (On Mind). Timoteo Viti (1469-1523) became the court painter for the Duke of Urbino on the death of Giovanni Santi. He became a teacher and mentor for Raphael there and later in Rome. Viti was a political activist and freethinker who had a decisive influence on the mind of his protégé. He appears in various guises throughout Raphael's work – notably in the painter's final painting *The Transfiguration* – to express an element of doubt or reflection. He was also a friend of Tommaso Inghirami, seen here as Democritus writing a book. Theophilus is the name of the mysterious person for whom Luke's Gospel and Acts were written.

Democritus of Abdera as Tommaso 'Fedra' Inghrami as St Luke

Democritus Tommaso Inghirami Mantegna's St Luke (1454)

Democritus of Abdera (ca 460-370 B.C.) was a student of Leucippus and was the founder of atomism. His major work was *The Great Diacosmos* (World Order). Raphael has cheekily placed Pope Julius the Second's emblematic wreath of oak leaves on the head of the atheist Democritus while doubling his likeness with that of his close friend the poet and actor Tommaso 'Fedra' Inghrami, the Vatican Librarian and Papal Secretary who was probably the main source for the philosophical content of the painting itself. Raphael's 1511 oil portrait of Fedra with his strabismus conceals a message that the artist must confront the world and at the same time view it from an oblique perspective.

Magia Santi as the Virgin Mary as Theano (the wife of Pythagoras)

Raphael's *Madonna Tempi (1508)*

Santi's portrait of Magia

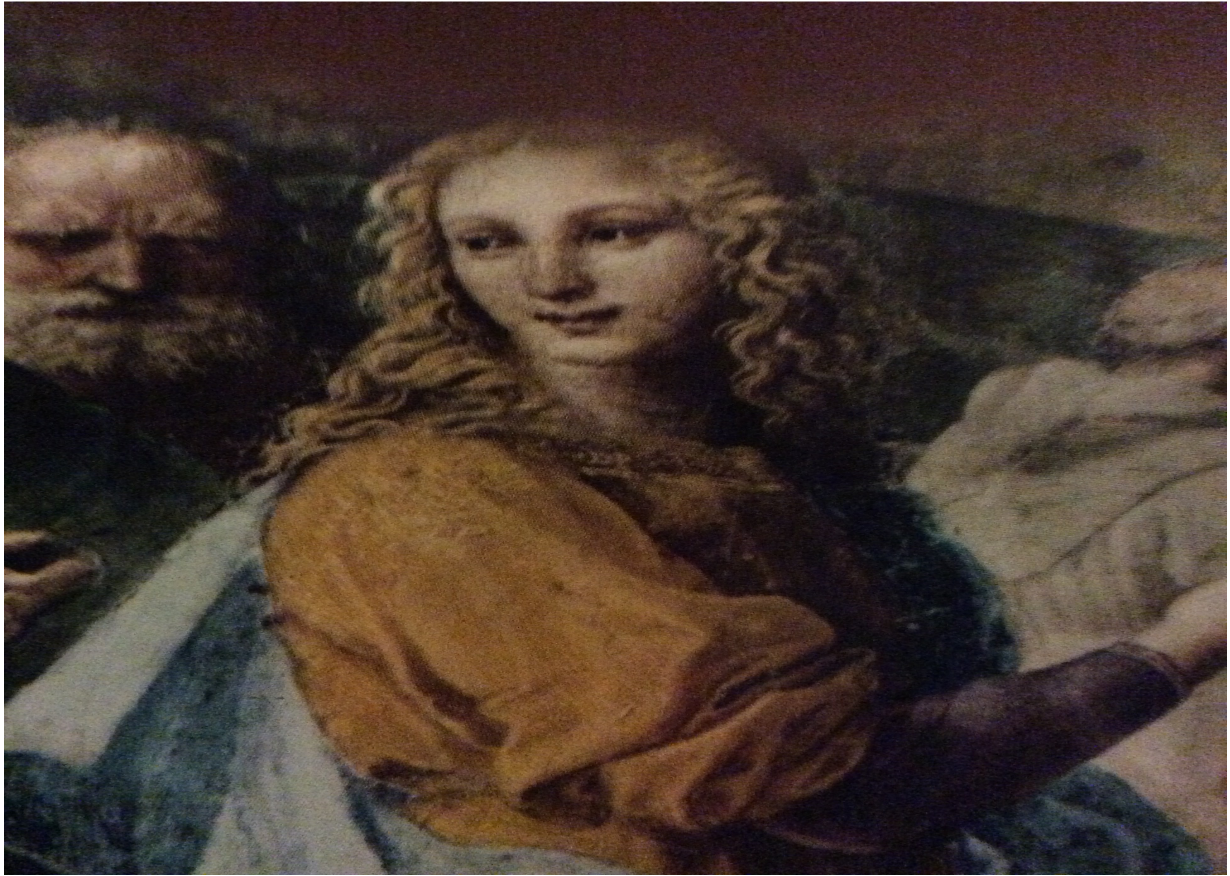
Theano was reportedly the wife of Pythagoras and mother of Telauges and Damo. She was a philosopher in her own right. The surviving fragment of her *On Piety* discusses an analogy between numbers and objects - a Pythagorean concern. Here her gesture with two fingers to her son may refer to the feminine principle attached to the number two. If the gesture is in fact directed towards her daughter Damo, later an active Pythagorean, that may refer to the principle of female equality that Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim (1487-1535) adduced from the teachings of Pythagoras.

Magia Santi, Raphael's mother, was the model for his early Madonnas. The green bonnet is associated with the verdant cap of Giovanni Santi depicted in the bottom left corner of the *School*. The shade of green matches the dominant colour in Santi's paintings expressing the life force of Umbria ('the green heart of Italy'). The word *magia* means magic in Spanish. Magic (Latin *mageia*) was a central concept in the writings of Pico della Mirandola who wished to see the Christian miracles as a continuation of the magic practised in the Cabbala in order to reinvigorate Christianity. Giles of Viterbo (as the geographer Strabo in the *School*) also sought a reconciliation of ancient Roman and Etruscan symbolism with Catholic ritual. The syncretist idea of a synergy between all religions is reinforced in *La Disputa* by the appearance of an endless knot below the monstrum and by the presence of Mirandola in a blue robe amongst the group of heretics in the left foreground. He is gesturing towards a book (possibly his own *Oration on the Dignity of Man*) held by a man who resembles the elderly Bramante. This book is evoking the curiosity and passion of the bystanders including two kneeling students who appear to be transfixed. However their gaze is not directed at the host,

the physical symbol of Christ's resurrection, but at the vivid mysterious icon to which their teacher in a similar blue robe is directing their attention. Two of the crouching students have hairstyles which match those of their teachers. The tall figure with tousled dark hair is probably the German scholar Johannes Reuchlin and the two books at his feet are his major works *De Verbo Mirifico* (1494) and *De Arte Cabbalistica* (1517). (Barham 1843)

Johannes Reuchlin

The message of secular syncretism introduced by Diagoras in the *School* is reflected in the *Dispute of the Holy Sacrament* through the young man with the flowing curly locks (a characteristic feature of Pico's appearance).



Reinforcing the allusion are the anamorphic designs around his neck. At first glance they appear to be part of his hair but seen in closeup they reveal a controversial secret at the heart of Mirandola's Kabbalistic philosophy. Next to a pair of young lions we can clearly make out the initials D P. What does this mean? Raphael often embedded Latin inscriptions in his works, generally his own name or initials. Could this be an allusion to *Deus Populi*, the usual reference to Israel as the Chosen People? This analysis is reinforced by the depiction of the young lions next to the initials. They are whelps, not the rampant lions of the Medicis depicted in the *School*, and refer to the symbolism of the Lion of Judah which runs throughout the Hebraic tradition beginning with the verse in Genesis 49:9:

> Judah, a lion's whelp
> From prey you have risen, my son:
> He bends low, he crouches like a lion
> And like a lion – who would rouse him.

Mirandola, in his controversial *900 Theses* and particularly in the *Heptaplus* had advocated for a regeneration of the Christian faith through a rediscovery of Mosaic traditions which could, he thought, reinvigorate Catholic ritualistic practice such as that of the Holy Sacrament and potentially that of the Christian miracles. "No science proves the divinity of Christ better than the Kabbalah and magic" he wrote in the *Conclusions*. Such a dangerous idea may have lead to his death by poisoning in 1494 and for Raphael to identify with Pico's cause inside the bastion of Vatican orthodoxy was a bold act – almost bordering on heresy.

Empedocles of Agrigentum (c. 495-435 B.C.E.)

Bust of Empedocles

Nuremberg Chronicle (1493)

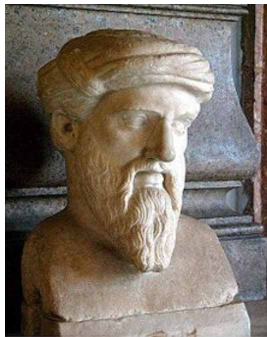
Empedocles was a teacher of the sophist Gorgias and a friend of Anaxagoras. In his main work *On Nature*, a treatise written in verse, he established the idea of the four elements - fire, earth, air and water. In it he attempts a history of the universe and outlines theories of perception, causation and biological phenomena. He was strongly influenced by Pythagoras and espoused a form of reincarnation. Compare the ear nose and furrowed glabella in Raphael's painting with the portrait of Empedocles in the *Nuremberg Chronicle* (1493). This is a clue that the Chronicle was probably one of the sources of information made available to him by his friend Tommaso Inghirami, the Vatican librarian.

Empedocles as St Mark as Ludovico Ariosto

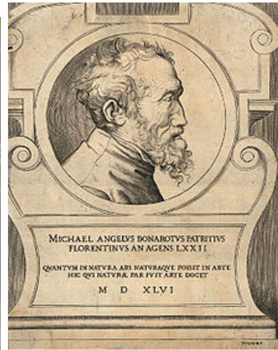
Ariosto from Catena's *Madonna with Saints* (1512) | Empedocles/St Mark/Ariosto in *The School of Athens* | Ariosto as St. Paul in *La Disputa* | Donatello's *St Mark* (1413)

Ludovico Ariosto, the author of the Italian epic poem *Orlando Furioso (1516)*, was a close friend of Raphael. He appears in *La Disputa* as St. Paul and was advisor to Raphael about the theological content of that painting. In the *Parnassus* Ariosto is seen top right flirting with Erato, the Greek muse of love poetry.

Pythagoras of Samos (c. 570-495 B.C.E.) as Michaelangelo as St Matthew



Pythagoras



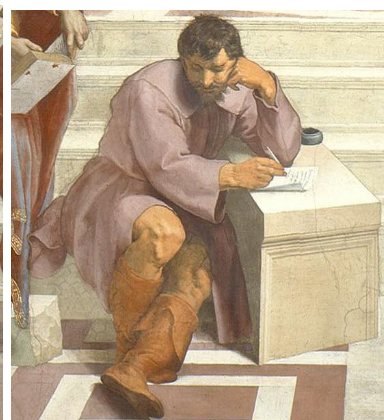
Michaelangelo

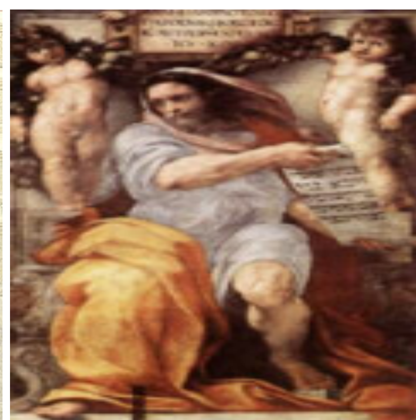
Pythagoras as St Matthew as Michaelangelo

Rembrandt's *St Matthew and the Angel* (1661)

Is Rembrandt's painting a nod to the *School of Athens*? St Matthew is traditionally shown inscribing his gospel accompanied by an angel.

Michaelangelo: Two Views





Raphael's The Prophet Isaiah (1512)

Compare the correspondences between the two inkwells, the angle of the right arms and the shape of their writing hands. The figure with the boots was not in the original cartoon. However it is unthinkable that Raphael would not have included Michaelangelo in this panoply of Greek and Renaissance geniuses. The broken nose, hunched neck and right ear of the figure on the left match Buonarotti's physical features. The clenched hand of the sculptor is anamorphically disguised in the gnarly right knee – just as Raphael had done with the left knee of his *The Prophet Isaiah* (1512).

This prompted Michaelangelo's rare compliment “For that knee alone it is worth the price.” The trace of a smile on the face of the figure in boots and the glance directed towards his knee may be a nod to this event – given the Florentine's constant jibes about Raphael's artistic originality. What Michaelangelo had in common with Pythagoras St Matthew and St Paul was their aloof and autocratic natures.

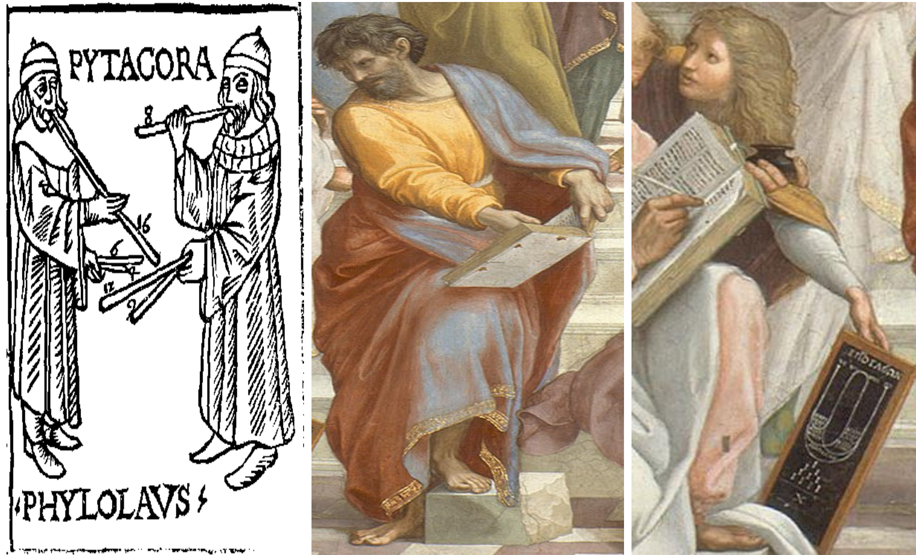
Raphael and Michaelangelo: *grazia* versus *terribilita*

Rona Goffen observed in his book *Renaissance Rivals*:

'Grazia is an attribute or rather a gift that presupposes two parties, the giver and the recipient, in a specifically vertical relationship [...] that moves exclusively in an up and down direction, from the prince to his courtier. Raphael instinctively knew how to take either role. The *grazia* that characterised Raphael's life and art is the antithesis of Michaelangelo's *terribilita*.'

(Goffen 2004)

Philolaus of Croton (c. 470-385 B.C.E.)



Medival woodcut by
Franchino Gaffurio

Philolaus, a contemporary of Socrates, represents a significant line of thought between Pythagoras and Plato whose *Timaeus* (which Plato is holding in the *School*) was strongly influenced by Philolaus's work *On Nature*. His message of mathematical harmony anticipates the Platonic idea of form (*eidos*). The connection between music, mathematics and the harmony of the spheres is reinforced by the depiction of a diagram of harmonics which Pythagoras's son Telauges is displaying on a tablet. (For a detailed explanation of the diagram see Joost-Gaugier, C. *Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura*, 2002 pp.82-83).

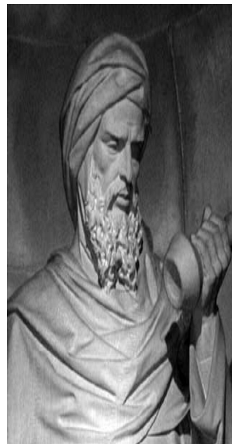
Philolaus as Johannes Reuchlin as St John

Johannes Reuchlin

Donatello's *St John* (1415)

The German scholar Johannes Reuchlin wrote in his *De Arte Cabbalistica* in 1517 "Philolaus of Croton: nearly all Pythagorean philosophy is full of signs for words, and cloaks for things, a form of communication that he, so it is believed, was the first to take to the Greeks from the Hebrews… and the Egyptians." (Reuchlin 1983). The occult stars on the back of the volume reflect the mystical bent of all three men and the hermetic style of their major works (*On Nature*, *De Arte Cabbalistica*, the *Book of Revelation*). Reuchlin's *De Arte Cabalistica* (On the Kabbalah) was composed of three parts (reflected in the three stars on the cover of the book he is holding).

Averroes (Ibn Rushd of Cordoba) (1126-1198 A.D.) as Elias del Medigo as Balthazar

Man with Turban in the *School*

Averroes

Elias del Medigo

Balthazar

Averroes maintained the tradition of Aristotle and Plato lost to the West during the Middle Ages. The Jewish philosopher Elias del Medigo introduced Pico della Mirandola to the Kabbalah in Perugia. Pico's Damascan conversion to Averroism and syncretism contributed, along with the writings of Ficino, Giles of Viterbo and others to a Renaissance fascination with astrology magic and the occult and a rediscovery of Pythagorean philosophy. In *De Ente et Uno* Pico, inspired by Averroes, revisited the 'Plato versus Aristotle' debate which is depicted in the *School*. Here the Oriental turbaned figure stares at the writings of Pythagoras

and is being observed intently by the man in the yellow robe representing Philolaus St John and Johannes Reuchlin. The Mishnaic Hebrew word cabbala itself means 'reception, received lore' (Arabic qabbala 'he received, accepted') and is etymologically linked to 'capture', 'capable' and the German 'haben'. This idea of 'sense reception' (*Sinnenempfang*) is also a central notion in angeletic hermeneutics.

Hypatia of Alexandria (370-415 A.D.) as Raphael as Jesus Christ

Hypatia as Jesus Christ as Raphael

Raphael's Self Portrait (1514)

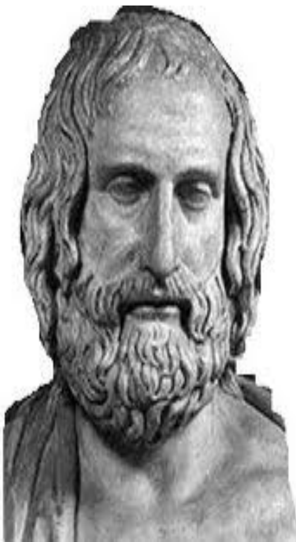
Raphael's *Christ Blessing* (1502)

What unites the three figures is their early deaths. Raphael's identification with Jesus began with his early Madonna paintings and continued throughout his career right to his last painting *The Transfiguration* (1520). He also died on a Good Friday. Hypatia was strongly influenced by the thought of Pythagoras and Plato and was stoned to death by the Christians of Alexandria for her heretical views. The similarity between the likeness of Hypatia in the *School* and that of Raphael in his self-portraits is striking.

Hypatia as Francesco di Rovere?

According to one theory the figure of Hypatia is based on Francesco di Rovere, the nephew of Julius II, but the physical similarity is not obvious. The Pope's nephew disgraced himself fighting against the French at Bologna in 1510 as Raphael was working on the *School*. Julius considered making his nephew pay with his life for his cowardice. The story that the Pope requested Raphael to change the female features of Hypatia to those of Francesco is unlikely.

Michaelangelo as Protagoras (c. 490-420 B.C.E.) as St Paul



Protagoras of Abdera

Michaelangelo/Protagoras/Paul

Jacopino del Conte's portrait of Michaelangelo (c 1535)

This figure, since Bellori's *Lives* in the seventeenth century, has been mistakenly identified as Heraclitus of Ephesus but the Weeping Philosopher is actually represented by the sad old man in the green hat opposite Democritus, the Laughing Philosopher, at the bottom left side - a common juxtaposition in Renaissance painting. Both St Paul, writer of the Epistles, and Protagoras of Abdera (c 490-420 B.C.), the apostle of rational doubt and author of *On the Gods*, lived in exile. Protagoras was a pupil of Democritus and a defender of agnosticism.

Protagoras as Michaelangelo: wrestling with the truth

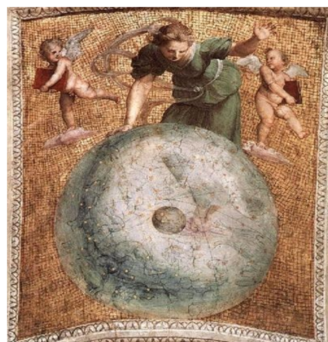
The message of Protagoras was 'Man is the measure of all things of things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not'. The boots may be a reference to the hilly terrain of Abdera – the birthplace of Protagoras who was originally a porter until discovered as a philosopher by his compatriot Democritus. Michaelangelo notoriously slept in his boots. Both he and Protagoras were interested in wrestling. Buonarotti sculpted the

'Two Wrestlers' and Protagoras wrote a book on the sport called *The Throws* in which he used wrestling as a metaphor for thought. Plato too was a wrestler and 'Plato' was his ring name - 'the broad-shouldered one'.

Aristotle's Group – the Lyceum, the Stoa, the Peripatetics Cynics and Epicureans

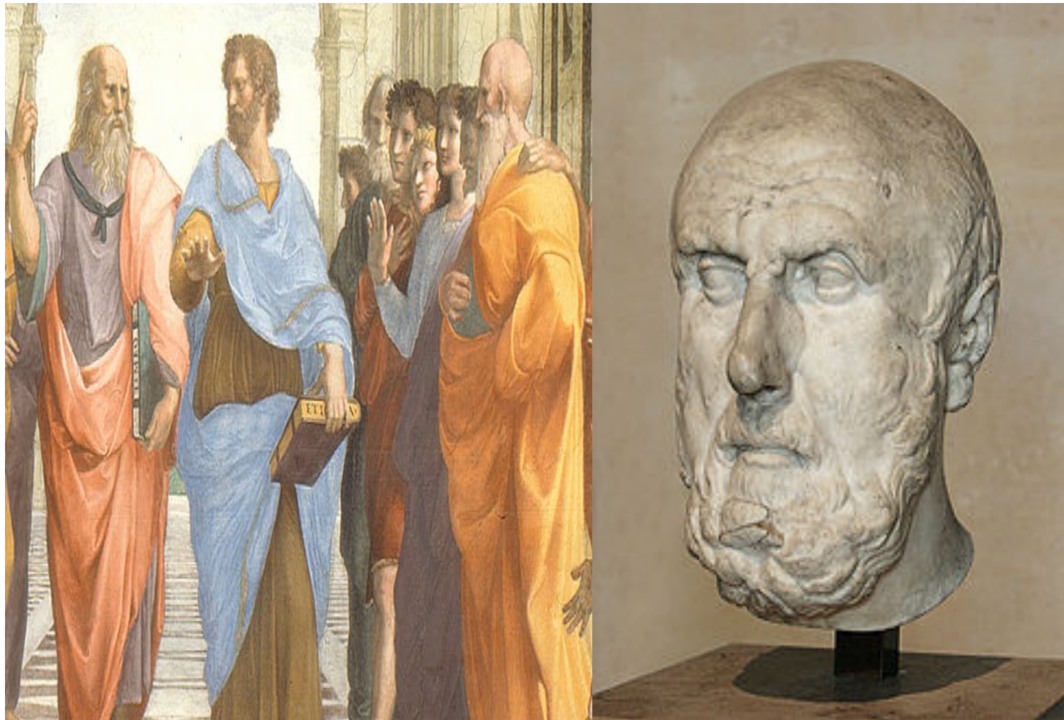
1. Aristotle of Stageira 2. Diogenes of Sinope 3. Eudemus of Rhodes 4. Theophrastus of Eresos 5. Strato of Lampsacus 6. Lyco of Troas 7. Aristo of Ceos 8. Zeno of Citium 9. Chrysippus of Soli 10. Demetrius of Phalerum 11. Heraclides of Heraclea 12. Epicurus of Samos 13. Crates of Thebes

Urania - Aristotle's Prime Mover



Aristotle's doctrine of first cause (*primum movens*) is depicted visually by Raphael in the ceiling vault depiction of Urania dedicated to Pope Julius II. In his *Metaphysics* Aristotle describes the Prime Mover as perfectly beautiful, indivisible and self-contemplating. For him the first cause and source of the cosmos was *energeia*. For Renaissance Christian theology it was God the Creator. The hylomorphic Active Intellect was later developed in the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas as the unmoved mover. The anamorphic sketches on the eye-like sphere appear to indicate that the creative imagination issues from the active intellect of the divinely inspired artist informed by knowledge (symbolised by the two *putti* holding books).

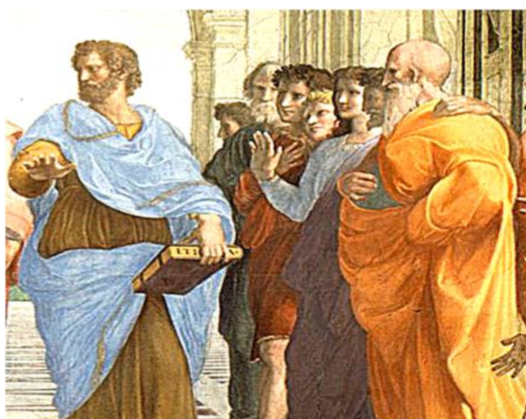
Chrysippus of Soli



Bust of Chrysippus in the British Museum

Chrysippus of Soli (c. 279-206 B.C.E.) was the major philosopher of Stoicism and the father of formal grammar. Here he represents *grammatikos* (Grammar), the third component of the trivium of knowledge depicted in the *School*. Plato, with his upward-pointing finger referencing the ideal hierarchical world of forms (universals), represents the vertical autonomic perspective. He is glaring angrily at Chrysippus and his teacher Zeno of Citium whose Stoic philosophy affirmed the primacy of *phantasia* and *katalêpsis*, universal *epochê* and propositional logic - a more empirical and heteronomic view of logos. Aristotle with his intervening hand gesture attempts to mediate between them as if to say "Hold on Plato, Chrysippus does have an argument". And on Plato's right the group of scholarchs are reacting to this dispute as are the students of Aristotle's Lyceum on the opposite side.

Zeno of Citium

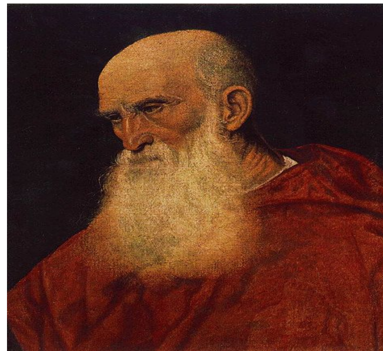


Zeno with his arm around Chrysippus

Herma of Zeno in the Pushkin Museum

The Cyprian Zeno of Citium (c.334-262 B.C.E.) was the founder of Stoicism. Diogenes Laertius describes him as a haggard and tanned ascetic who died stoically – by simply holding his breath. His pupil Cleanthes was the teacher of Chrysippus who gave Zeno's thought its fullest expression. Zeno's idea about the entanglement of knowledge and communication is illustrated by this anecdote from Cicero's Academica ii. 4 : 'Zeno stretched out his fingers, and showed the palm of his hand, - "Perception," - he said, - "is a thing like this."- Then, when he had closed his fingers a little, - "Assent is like this." - Afterwards, when he had completely closed his hand, and showed his fist, that, he said, was Comprehension. From which simile he also gave that state a new name, calling it *katalepsis*. But when he brought his left hand against his right, and with it took a firm and tight hold of his fist: - "Knowledge" - he said, was of that character; and that was what none but a wise person possessed.'

Pietro Bembo as Chrysippus and Fra Bartolomeo as Demetrius of Phalerum



9. Pietro Bembo 10. Fra Bartolomeo

Pietro Bembo was a writer, scholar and cardinal who between 1506 and 1512 lived in Urbino, Raphael's home town. He was an admirer of Petrarch and Bocaccio. In his best known work *Gli Asolani,* The People of Asolano *(*1497-1504) Bembo depicts the plight of three lovers and offers Platonic or Divine love as a complement to their physical attraction. Dedicated to Lucrezia Borgia, with whom Bembo had an affair, *Gli Asolani* was an attempt to reconcile spiritual love with romantic relationships. In this respect Bembo resembled Chrysippus of Soli who had also argued for a form of phenomenological personalism in his concept of the informing soul (*pneuma*) – a notion which later intrigued the Peripatetics including Demetrius of Phalerum. Here in the *School* we can see the trace of a smile on the face of Chrysippus. According to Diogenes Laertius the Stoic philosopher died laughing after suggesting to an old woman that she give wine to an ass.

Fra Bartolomeo with his tonsured head doubles the figure of Demetrius of Phalerum, politician writer and major philosopher of the Aristotelian school of Peripatetics. Just as many of the statues of Demetrius had been famously destroyed by his enemies several paintings by Fra Bartolomeo were burnt on Savanorola's Bonfire of the Vanities of February 7th 1497. Fra Bartolomeo was a friend of Raphael and worked with him in Florence in 1507.

Diogenes of Sinope (the Cynic) (412-323 B.C.E.) as Girolamo Savonarola

Statues of Diogenes of Sinope Fra Bartolomeo's *Savonarola*

Anamorphically concealed in the blue garment of Diogenes the Cynic (whom Plato called 'a Socrates gone mad') can be seen the features of a snarling dog - an oblique reference to the aquiline proboscis of Girolamo Savonarola, the barking mad Dominican monk of Florence portrayed by Raphael in *La Disputa* next to Dante.

Epicurus of Samos (341-270 B.C.E.) and Crates of Thebes (c. 365-285 B.C.E.)

Epicurus as Pico della Mirandola and Crates of Thebes as Gianfresco

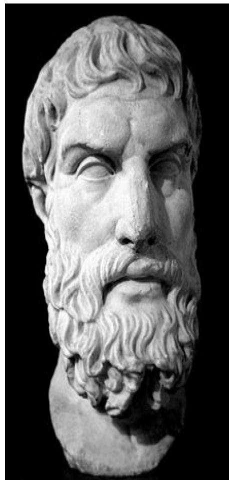
IOHANNES PICUS
Mirandule Comes.

Gianfresco Pico

Like Crates of Thebes Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola, nephew of the more famous Renaissance scholar Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, was a sceptic and a supporter of Pyrrhoism rejecting both Epicurus and Stoicism. Crates became a pupil of Diogenes the Cynic – reflected here in the corresponding blue and grey cloaks and the anamorphic dog concealed in the top of Crates' tunic. Similarly Gianfresco was a disciple and biographer of Savonarola (the 'Socrates of Ferrara'). Gianfresco also espoused the Kabbalah – illustrated by the golden snake ornament around his neck, a symbol of doubt and scepticism (Amalek).

In his *Examen Doctrinae Unitatis Gentium* (1520) he was critical of Aristotle – as were the Greek Cynics Diogenes and Crates.

Epicurus of Samos as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola



Epicurus of Samos

Epicurus in the *School* indicating Diogenes

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola

Epicurus, whose philosophical message was *ataraxia* (freedom from fear) *aponia* (absence of pain) and the importance of friends, here gestures towards Diogenes the Cynic asking Crates how this life of *askesis* (shamelessness) and social alienation can be justified. Crates, a student of Diogenes, points in the direction of the Stoics Chrysippus and Crates' former pupil Zeno of Citium blaming them for the mist of confusion Stoicism had caused. As the sixth scholarch of the First Academy Crates founded the tradition of radical scepticism and the rejection of Platonic idealism continued with the Second and Third Academies under Arcesilaus of Pitane and Carneades respectively.

Pico della Mirandola (known for his long curly locks) is here masked behind the figure of Epicurus. The Renaissance scholar Christiane Joost-Gaugier argues in her book 'Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura' (p.95) that Pico can be seen 'as the young man seen from the back who actively enters the painting and implores with his hands on Aristotle's side.' Mirandola was in fact a strong critic of Aristotle and an apologist for Epicurus, re-evaluating his notion of pleasure. Here Pico is appealing to his nephew Gianfrancesco to explain the tragic situation of Pico's mentor Savonarola just as Epicurus is asking Crates to vindicate the life of his teacher Diogenes of Sinope.

Euclid's Group

1 – 4. Euclid's students 5. Euclid of Alexandria 6. Strabo the Geographer 7. Ptolemy 8. Raphael 9. Perugino

Euclid’s Four Students and the communicative learning process

As Glenn Most (Most 1996) and Rafael Capurro (Capurro 1999) have observed there is a communicative synergy between the four students. The non-comprehending boy on the lower left is reassured by the student behind him who pats him on the shoulder after gaining an initial insight into the figure Euclid is drawing. The youth in the green coat begins to comprehend the problem and its solution and looks up at the young man who hovers over all three with a superior intelligence indicating with his right hand that he understands.

Euclid’s Four Students: imitation, intuition, imagination, understanding

The youngest boy in light blue represents *imitatio* (imitation). He is the keen young student who tries to imitate the master by leaning over and getting as close as possible to the drawing. The anamorphic representation of a parrot can be discerned in his folded waistband. Around the back of the student behind him can be seen a snake devouring its tail - the uroborus of intuition and self-reference. The kneeling youth in the centre wears a green coat populated by a myriad of tiny designs and figures only revealed in close up. This is the creative student who grasps with his imagination. Hovering over them is the senior student who bears a hidden owl on his blue vest (directly below the frieze depicting Minerva) and a lion around his knee - both wisdom and courage are required for learning. The combination of imitation, intuition, imagination and understanding yields knowledge.

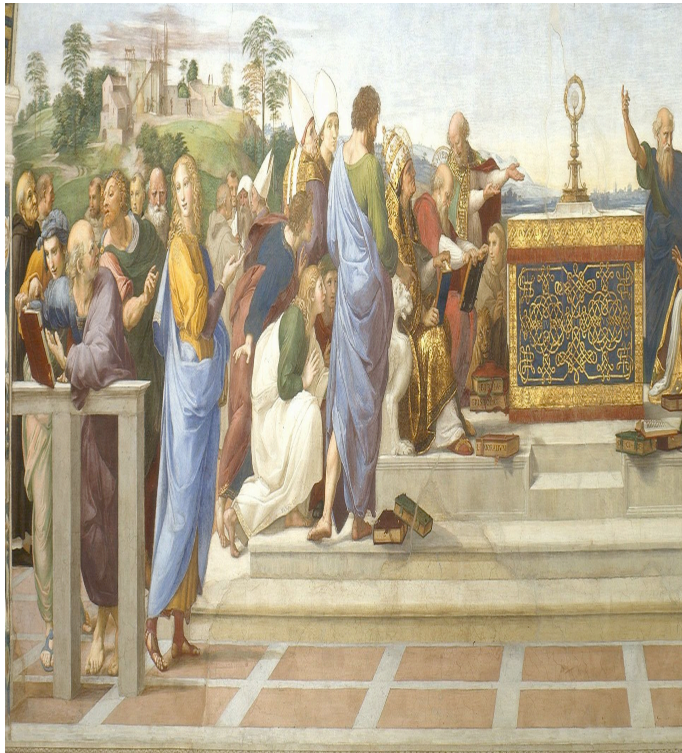
Euclid of Alexandria (fl. 300 B.C.E.) as the older Donato Bramante

Bramante portrait Bramante as Euclid Euclid's triangles in the *School* unicursal hexigram

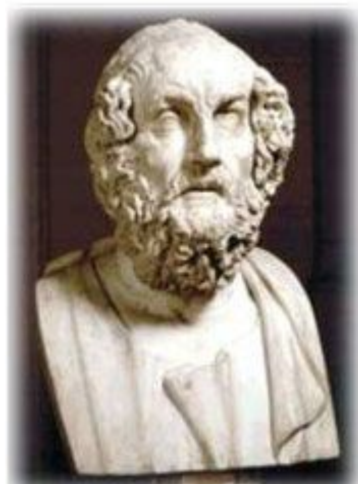
Around Euclid's neck a gold ornament bears the initials R.U.S.M. – Raphaello Urbinas Sua Manu (by the hand of Raphael from Urbino). He is drawing the figure of a hexagram with a compass - performance learning rather than the 'blue sky' approach of Platonic idealism. The unicursal hexagram first designed by Euclid was later continued in the Cabbala, the mathesis of Giordano Bruno and the spiritual philosophy (thelema) of Aleister Crowley. It is ritually performed as a ceremony of invocation and banishment – a subtheme of the *School* itself. The angles and centre of the hexagram, in both its traditional and unicursal forms, evoke or banish planetary forces by drawing the lineal hexagram from a specific point in a given manner. The proximity of Ptolemy of Egypt lends credence to this concealed sense of Euclid's action - a message of syncretism beneath the official Renaissance code which glorified science and mathematics but left Catholic ritual intact. Could it be that this secret pagan rite, beyond the instruction of a lesson in geometry by the mathematical magus of Alexandria, is what Euclid's four students are slowly coming to understand? Across on the North wall of the Stanza della Segnatura three other students, also in the presence of an avatar of Bramante, are experiencing a similar epiphany as they stare at the monstrum and the intriguing icon below it - a perfect endless knot which often represents the eternal weaving of mind, time and movement and the interplay between religious and secular worlds. Through the strands can be discerned the name of Pope Julius – Christianity embroidering the fabric of syncretism.

Both Da Vinci and Albrecht Durer were fascinated by the endless knot and incorporated forms of it into their art – Durer in his woodcuts and Da Vinci in the design around the neck of his *Mona Lisa*. Raphael was possibly the only Renaissance artist to depict a complete version.

Raphael's presence can be seen in the figure of the young bishop casting a desultory glance at the man in the blue robe – in contrast to the Church Fathers who are gesturing enthusiastically towards the Eucharist. As occurs in many of his paintings, if you locate Raphael's self-portrait the key to the subliminal message of the work can be found in the vicinity.



Strabo of Pontus as Giles of Viterbo



Bust of Strabo

Strabo of Pontus with Ptolemy

Giles of Viterbo

Strabo of Pontus (64 B.C.E. to 24 A.D.) was a cartographer historian and philosopher whose work *Geographica* is a seminal publication in geography. He was influenced by the

Peripatetic and Stoic schools of philosophy – which explains his location in the *School.* The Augustinian Giles of Viterbo (Giles Antonini) was a leading figure of the Renaissance noted for his bold sermons and his attempts to reconcile Christian theology with ancient Roman anthropology and the Hebrew Kabbalah (Most 1996). Along with Mirandola and Reuchlin he advocated the renewal of Christianity through Etruscan paganism and Jewish mysticism (Joost-Gaugier,1998).

Ptolemy of Alexandria (Claudius Ptolemaeus) (100-170 A.D.)

Ptolemy of Alexandria

Ptolemy was a Roman geographer, astronomer and astrologer resident in Alexandria. His major works were three scientific treatises – the *Almagest* (*Mathēmatikē Syntaxis),* the *Geography* and the *Tetrabiblos (Four Books*). The *Almagest* was the definitive text on astronomy throughout the Middle Ages. Ptolemy was sometimes confused with the Egyptian dynasty of emperors of the same name – hence the crown on his head depicted in the *School.* The Renaissance persona hidden behind Ptolemy may be Piero della Francesca, the painter and mathematician who worked with Giovanni Santi at the court of Federigo in Urbino and who had an influence on the young Raphael.

Piero della Francesco's *Polyptich of the Misericordia* (1462)

Raphael and Perugino as Apelles of Kos and Protegenes of Caunus (fl. 300 B.C.E)

Raphael's portrait of his teacher Pietro Perugino of 1504 (centre) is linked to the version in the *School of Athens* by the black cloak and thin white collar. Some have argued that the likeness was modified later by another painter. Raphael was nicknamed 'the new Apelles' after Apelles of Kos, a Greek painter of the Fourth Century B.C. Comparisons between Raphael and his master Perugino were often made – paralleling the rivalry between Apelles and his teacher Protogenes. The German scholar Frank Keim (Keim 2006) has argued that the Perugino figure is actually Copernicus (above right) who was in Rome at the same time as Raphael. The resemblance to Copernicus's self-portrait is quite strong.

The Eclectics and Radical Sceptics

1. Pythodorus 2. Arcesilaus of Pitane 3. Carneades of Cyrene 4. Pyrrho of Elis 5. Timon of Phlius 6. Theodorus the Atheist of Cyrene

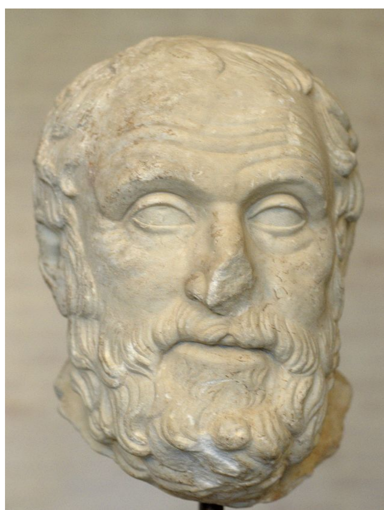
Arcesilaus (316-241 B.C.E.) with his student and scribe Pythodorus

Pythodorus and Arcesilaus

Arcesilaus and Carneades

Arcesilaus was a successor to Crates as scholarch of Plato's academy remaining its head until his death in 241 B.C. His philosophical thoughts were not written down by him but recorded by his students, notably Pythodorus. He, like Carneades, espoused a radical scepticism rejecting the core ideas of Chrysippean epistemology such as *akatalêpsia* (nothing can be known) and *epochê* (suspension of all beliefs). He also attacked Zeno's central notions of *phantasia* (impressions or appearance of things) and *katalêpsis* (grasping or cognition) and argued for the impossibility of knowing. The windswept hair of Pythodorus implies that the winds of change are blowing from the direction of the skeptical worlds of Arcesilaus, Carneades and Pyrrho to unsettle the foundations of the Platonic and Aristotelian schools.

Carneades of Cyrene (214-129 B.C.E.) as Donatello



Statue of Carneades in the
Glyptothek Museum Munich

Donatello's statue outside
the Uffizi Gallery in Florence

Upstage right the Radical Skeptic Carneades, the head of the Third Academy, observes Crates debate with Epicurus about Diogenes, aware that the cause of knowledge and the Aristotelian knowledge of causes (*causarum cognitio* – the motto of the *School of Athens*) have been abandoned. His downward-pointing finger tells us that Platonic idealism has foundered. His refutation of all dogmatic doctrines and -isms, his emphasis on the uncertainty of justice and the impossibility of knowledge make Carneades a postmodernist *avant la lettre*. In old age Carneades neglected his beard and suffered from cataracts on his eyes - hence his squinting gaze.

Pyrrho of Elis (360-270 B.C.E.)

Statue of Pyrrho

Pyrrho of Elis was a painter turned philosopher who was initially influenced by Democritus. He later accompanied Alexander the Great to India and Persia where he studied Eastern philosophy with the Gymnosophists and the Magi. His central message is *acatalepsia* – for every statement a contradictory proposition may be equally advanced. As a result he adopted a lifestyle of indifference - the *ataraxia* of Diogenes the Cynic - to escape the troubles of the world. Like Carneades he was a Radical Skeptic believing that only the appearance of things can be known (*aletheuin* and *pseudesthai*) – neither our sensations nor our opinions are true or false. The walking stick indicates a traveller, the white headband his sympathy with the Orient and his faded green cloak a *Weltmüdigkeit* which has replaced the bright green life force expressed in the hat of Heraclitus and the wreath of Democritus. The anamorphic designs on Pyrrho's coat reflect his Eastern mystical affinities. A sixteenth century woodcut by Petrarcameister (circa 1525) depicts an incident described by Diogenes Laertius illustrating Pyrrho's alleged *apatheia* - the ethic of indifference and insensitivity in the face of danger and the opinions of the world. Here he is pointing to the relaxed pig calmly eating on the ship tossed by a tempest as an example of *ataraxia*.

Timon of Phlius (c.320-230 B.C.E.)

Timon of Phlius was a pupil of Pyrrho and an advocate of Pyrrhonian scepticism. His best known work was the *Silloi* or Lampoons, a collection of satirical poems about the inadequacy of living and dead philosophers. He also wrote a work supporting the scepticism of Arcesilaus - *Arcelisaus's Funeral Banquet* and may have been influenced by Crates of Thebes. The trace of a grin on his face may reflect his satirical bent. His eyes are closed – Timon was blind in one eye and his nickname was Cyclops. According to Aristocles Timon first met Pyrrho 'wandering along the road like a madman' as he travelled to the Pythian festival.

Theodorus the Atheist of Cyrene (c. 340-250 B.C.E.) as the Exiting Messenger

The exiting messenger (Theodorus the Atheist), with his parting expression of disillusionment and his deprecating *mano fico* hand gesture above Raphael's head, seems to be saying 'There is no place for me or my poetic message in the Castle of Reason or the Citadel of Science. All I can do is run away and embrace anonymity. For knowledge without passion, communication and a sense of justice is moribund.' Today's disillusioned youth might identify with the departing messenger's despair. Theodorus's flight signals the end of Plato's Academy, the demise of Renaissance idealism and anticipates the radical sceptics of postmodernism such as Debord Zizek and Sloterdijk.

Theodorus of Cyrene ('The Atheist') was also a pupil of Pyrrho and inherited his teacher's radical scepticism. According to Diogenes Laertius, Theodorus 'did away with all opinions respecting the Gods'. His atheistic hedonism was a result of rejecting knowledge and reason which only gave cause for grief (here reflected in his ill-fitting grey cloak). Embracing joy and physical pleasure was, according to him, the antidote to this grey state of affairs and he advocated theft, adultery and sacrilege – exemplified by the god of messengers, Hermes. The descendants of Theodorus are probably to be found in the bohemians of the nineteenth century or the beatniks, hippies and Situationists of the fifties and sixties. Like Diogenes the Cynic he rejected friendship and patriotism claiming to be a citizen of the world. As exiting messenger Theodorus is the other face of the arriving messenger Diagoras, both hedonistic atheists and angry young men who represent the daemonic alter ego of Raphael himself.

Diagoras and Theodorus: the motive of the messengers

This motive, repeated at the two extremities of the fresco, gives it a wonderful unity and movement, for the ardour of the young philosopher, who is so eager to take part in the debate that his feet scarcely touch the ground as he comes up, like one of the angels in the fresco of the Heliodorus. At the other extremity of the composition, a young man is running away; and it has been supposed that Raphael intended to represent by these two figures the beginning and the end of the great Greek school. (Müntz 1888 p.260)

Where is the Exiting Messenger, Theodorus the Atheist, going?

Exiting Messenger in the *School of Athens*

Youth seducing Clio the Muse of History in the *Parnassus*

Is there a message here? Is Raphaello's alter ego, by choosing Clio over the other eight muses, possibly embracing the spirit of history, the secular path of human progress and the Renaissance apotheosis of Man? Intriguingly the recurring pagan number symbol appears on the arm of Clio and her admirer, repeating its appearance on the arm of the angry suitor in the *Marriage of the Virgin.* In the *Dispute of the Holy Sacrament* the same symbol is seen on the shoulder of St Paul/Ariosto and on the arm of the young man resembling Mirandola who gestures towards the knot design - itself containing forms of the same symbol. What does it mean? Is it an expression of Raphael's reputed Pythagoreanism or the signature of a painter who worked with mathematical precision and was exposed to mathematicians like Luca Pacioli during his childhood at the court of Federico da Montefeltro in Urbino? Raphael himself often considered painting to be more of a science than a craft - hence his depiction in the *School* close to the famous mathematicians, geographers and astronomers of antiquity.

Lines of Thought in the *School of Athens*

DIOGENES

ARISTOTLE

PLATO

PYTHAGORAS

DEMOCRITUS

HERACLITUS

GORGIAS

Message and Code in Raphael

Angeletic situations in works of art are those where there is a dynamic tension between the aesthetic code and the personal message of the artist. Many of Raphael's paintings illustrate this dialectic between appearance and reality, between what is presented as surface meaning and what is concealed and revealed through a variety of artistic forms and techniques. Historically this message/code dynamic has been manifest in such techniques as Homeric and Sophoclean irony in literature, *contrapposto* in sculpture, dramatic chiaroscuro and tenebrism, the grotesque and the chimera, anamorphosis in painting and cinema, counterpoint in music.

Laokoon and his sons (contrapposto)

Botticelli's *La Primavera* (metaphorical ambiguity)

Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (anamorphism)

Caravaggio's *Conversion of St Paul (chiaroscuro)*

Goya's *Carlos IV and his family* (self-reference) Cattelan's *La Nona Ora* (satirical inversion)

The Coronation of the Virgin (Oddi altarpiece): belief versus doubt

The story about the Virgin's girdle being received by St Thomas reflects the Medieval code of discourse with its autonomic/vertical structure of belief. Mary is being crowned by Christ on the higher level while the Twelve Apostles cluster around her coffin below. The heteronomic/horizontal arrangement of the disciples suggests an egalitarian dialogue about the validity of the miracle. Ironically doubting Thomas seems to be the most fervid believer while several apostles express scepticism as they contemplate the dark reality of the coffin. Many disciples bear the facial features of Giovanni Santi, Raphael's father, whose despair over the death of his wife Magia is captured here. The bearded apostle third from the right stares thoughtfully at the flowers sprouting from the coffin given a diagonal orientation to indicate a divergence from orthodox belief. On the far right a young Raphael returns the gaze of the viewer with a hand over his heart testifying to the concealed message of the painting.

The Expulsion of Heliodorus – a hidden message behind the code?

The Third Guard Pico della Mirandola Zwingli

Raphael and the engraver Marcantonio Raimondi as members of Julius the Second's Swiss Guard observe us while Mirandola as the third guard slips a message to Raimondi. Is the third guard perhaps an avatar of the Swiss theologian Huldrych Zwingli who initially fought for Julius on his campaigns then was critical of the Pope's militarism. Could the message refer to Zwingli's doubts about Julius's introduction of the Swiss Guards? Were Raphael and Raimondi perhaps secret supporters of Pico della Mirandola and his philosophy? Raimondi's waistband reveals itself as a uroborus. The two dead figures behind the third guard's head are sinister when we remember that Pico and his close friend, the philologist Angelo Poliziano, were poisoned with arsenic in 1494 - as was recently discovered when their bodies were exhumed in 2011. Could Raphael have known details about the murder allegedly ordered by Piero di Lorenzo di Medici? Was Julius possibly aware of or even involved in the assassination? The official code here is that Julius's reputation and his place in history are supported by Renaissance artists and scholars. The Pope wears a beard in penance for the loss of Bologna – just as he does in the *Mass at Bolsena* (where Raphael also appears as a Swiss Guard sporting a strange Eastern headband). The *Expulsion* was originally Julius's commission to Raphael - to glorify his driving of contemporary heretics and enemies out of the temple of orthodox Catholicism. Heliodorus is wearing a pagan snake symbol around his neck matching the one worn by Gianfresco Pico alias Crates of Thebes in the *School*. Could the physical expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple of Jerusalem be a metaphor for the more permanent expulsion of the apostate Mirandola from the Church of Rome? Furthermore Marcantonio had recently collaborated with Raphael on the engraving the *Massacre of the Innocents* (1511) – the matching caps held by the litter bearers in the *Expulsion* resemble the one worn by a mother clutching her dying baby in the left foreground of the *Massacre*.

The Expulsion of Heliodorus – the note

What message is written on the note?

According to John Shearman in his monumental work 'Raphael in Early Modern Sources 1483-1602' (vol. 1 1483-1502 p. 157-8, Yale University Press, 2003) the words are

Jo. Petro de Foliiaris Cremonens

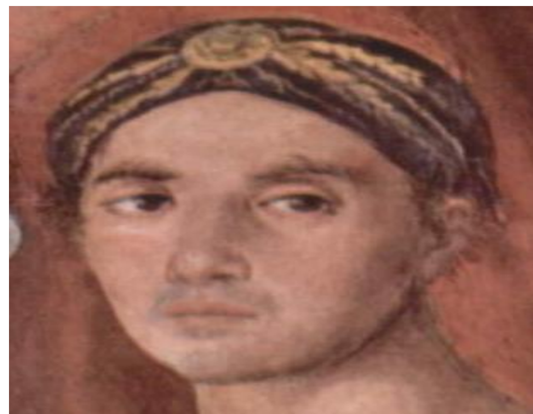
and refer to Giovanni Pietro, Julius's Secretary of Memoirs (*Segretario dei Memoriali*) or official historian. The mysterious third guard has therefore been considered to be Giovanni Pietro himself although the inscription may have been changed or added after Raphael's death to reinforce the official code of the painting as a panegyric of the Warrior Pope.

The Mass at Bolsena – what is the secret message?

Raphael as a Swiss Guard stares straight at us. The Guard in front of him is not looking up at the celebration of the mass but peers at the anamorphically concealed inscriptions in the vault. The walls in the vault depict scenes of death in battle reminding us of *vanitas* and *memento mori*. The hidden message is that beneath the orchestrated splendour of the miracle at Bolsena there is the ugly reality of physical death in warfare. If we follow the gaze of the Swiss Guard (who may have himself fought at Bologna and Ravenna during the Italian Wars) we discover two plaques with the dates of Julius's battles each supported by images of the sinister Monster of Ravenna (below). Is this possibly an ironic comment on the ignominious defeat of the armies of the Holy League at the Battle of Ravenna in 1512?

Diagonal messaging

The four golden fronds of oak, the personal symbol of Julius II born Giuliano della Rovere (rovere = oak), seen here on the priest’s cassock are in correspondance with the design on the headband of the Swiss Guard appearing as Raphael. They are mediated by the four bands of colour in the design of the monstrum which reveals itself as an occult scroll with heathen hieroglyphics. Behind the code – the official Catholic ceremony of Corpus Domini – Raphael’s aesthetic message suggests the congruence of pagan magic (*magia*) with Christian ritual. This was a central theme of Renaissance thought explored by Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola and Giles of Viterbo and is also a subliminal message in Raphael’s *La Disputa*. This syncretist viewpoint is reinforced by the expression of doubt on the face of the spectator above as the outstretched arm of his companion points to the monstrum.



The Mass at Bolsena – a hidden message about Julius II?

Julius II, the 'Warrior Pope', kneels at a prayer table wearing a beard in mourning for the loss of Bologna in 1512. Below the table, camouflaged as table legs and striding out beneath the palanquin to negotiate a settlement with the French, are two lion-faced Venetian legates. Raphael's signature scroll motif appears in the decorative column behind the Pope. On the left, behind an altar boy in white and amongst the crowd of revering believers, Julius's own dark-haired daughter Felice de Rovere reminds us of his past sins of the flesh.

Messengers and Witnesses – the deictic gesture

Throughout Raphael's paintings cues and clues to sense are provided by figures who display pointing gestures and are coupled with a witness responding to the sense offer with an ambiguous expression or stance or by confronting the viewer in a theatrical aside. Raphael thus challenges the witness outside the frame to respond to the situation depicted and to look for a message behind the official code of accepted meaning. This phenomenon anticipates the theatrical aside and Bertolt Brecht's alienation effect whereby an actor steps out of his or her character on stage to explain to the audience the meaning of a dramatic situation.

Raphael's deictic gesture: "What do you make of that?"

The Fire in the Borgo: Message versus Code

The *Fire in the Borgo* (1514) celebrates the intercession of Pope Leo IV in 847 A.D. to stop a raging fire in the Borgo district of Rome through his benediction from the loggia of St. Peter's. The woman raising her arms in the foreground appeals to the Pope for a miracle. This is the official code. The message, however, is somewhat different. It is the man of Middle Eastern appearance who, like the Good Samaritan, takes action and risks his life to save the mother's baby from the flames. The figure carrying the old man to safety (referencing Aeneas and his father) and the naked athletic youth (alluding to Michaelangelo) are involved with the victims of the fire and display their humanism in risk engagement and action – true to the Renaissance ideals. The Pope himself (with the features of Leo X) remains distant aloof and safe. The work was probably executed by Giulio Romano, Raphael's pupil, but the design and philosophy of the piece are Raphael's and express his personal message about the Church and the Papacy of that time.

The Ecstasy of Saint Cecilia: music death and Lacanian sexuality

The traditional code of the martyrdom of St Cecilia who sacrificed her earthly music and passion for spiritual ecstasy is depicted here. Nietzsche later saw in the painting a justification of Wagnerian rapture. Beyond the orthodox interpretation of the painting as a homiletic ‘fine and private vision of virginity’ (Stefaniak 1998) the artistic message is much more complex. The dark brooding figure on her right is both her executioner, the Roman prefect Turcius Almachius, and the apostle Paul. Painted in 1517, when Raphael came under the influence of the erotic writer Pietro Aretino, the subtext is distinctly Freudian – that music is the food of love. Phallic and yonic symbolism abounds here – in the Picasso-like instruments, St John's lusty blackbird pecking at the martyr's clitoris and the opening labia of her garment, St Paul's sword penetrating the triangle, and the lascivious stance *in contrapposto* of Mary Magdalene depicted as Raphael's lover, Margarita Luti, who is nestling against St Augustine, the patron saint of abstinence. The official moral code is expressed in Cecilia's chastity belt and reinforced by the Pauline injunction 'marry or burn' of I Corinthians and by the figure of St John as the patron saint of virginity. But lurking beneath this surface meaning is a concealed message about open promiscuity adultery and earthly pleasure. The witness confronting us with the painting's subtext is La Fornarina, a Renaissance *femme fatale* masquerading here as Mary the penitent prostitute. The *Ecstasy of Saint Cecilia* anticipates and illustrates Zizek’s Lacanian notions of obscene *jouissance* and inherent transgression:

The 'inherent transgression' refers to the notion that the very emergence of a certain 'value' which serves as a point of ideological identification relies on its transgression, on some mode of taking a distance from it. Ideology depends upon the 'gap' that the symbolic order produces between itself and the subject as an effect of bringing the latter into being as a subject of language. Since there is no direct, unmediated relationship between the subject and the authentic, true value, the problem of 'belief takes on vital importance. But the very

separation between belief and knowledge requires that the' true believer' must always be someone else. The 'Lacanian' decentred subject has to live out the authenticity of his being or her jouissance through the Other. (Zizek 1998).

Here St Cecilia lives out her *jouissance* through Others who have experienced carnal knowledge and authentic non-repressed sexuality, the ‘true believers’ in the libertine message of indulging in the music of corporeal delights – not in the Christian code of virginity, self-denial and spiritual pleasure in Heaven.

The experience of *St Cecilia* is the climax of an erotic current which flows from the veiled sexual relationship between the angry suitor and the pregnant Virgin in *Lo Sposalizio* (1504) to the *Three Graces of Chantilly* (1505) *Aphrodite Anadyomene* (1509) *Cupid and Psyche* (1516) and culminates in the confronting eroticism of the *Fornarina* (1520) (Clarke 2005). It is this sensual side of Raphael which inspired Pablo Picasso in his series of sketches *Raphael et La Fornarina* (1968).

Conclusion

Is Raphael’s paganism the secular elephant in the sacral Signature Room? Could it be that embedded in the Ambassadorial Palace of the Vatican are the works of a mischievous satirical spirit who is mocking the pretensions of organised religion and the hypocrisy of its representatives? As official painter to the Pope, did he secrete his personal message under a cloak of accepted artistic codes and narratives? Over nearly half a millennium the *School of Athens* has resisted analysis and lead to a myriad of conflicting interpretations. Under the microscope of angeletic hermeneutics the deeper, darker sense of this masterpiece may emerge revealing Raphael to be a philosophical painter who offers us complex insights into the social political and intellectual life of the Renaissance and a unique perspective on the human condition.

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