**Pythagorean economics**

**1 Introduction**

We know today that at least one more authentic economics has circulated in Antiquity. It was written by a neo-Pythagorean philosopher, who has contributed substantially to this science. I therefore now have to introduce a philosophical school from Antiquity, which has flourished in Southern Italy.

The founder of this philosophical school Pythagoras (c. 570 - c. 495 BC) was born on the Greek island of Samos in c. 570, that is long before Plato and Aristotle and the founders of the other schools. Around 530 BC he moved to Croton, now Crotone, at the southern coast of Italy, which by then already was largely colonized by the Greek cities. The followers of Pythagoras established a club in Croton, of which man as well as women were members. This club acted at the same time as a philosophical school, a religious fraternity and a political association. In other cities in South Italy Pythagorean clubs like the one in Croton were erected too. Pythagoras himself died c. 495 BC.

The members of these Pythagorean clubs gradually started to dominate the political scene in Croton and elsewhere in Southern Italy, till around 450 BC.[[1]](#endnote-1) Then they were attacked, and forbidden and their buildings demolished. After this political and military disaster in Southern Italy, the adherents of Pythagoras dispersed.

Some went to Sicily, others to Tarentum, the main commercial port in the southern Italy and several went still further away. The philosophers amongst them continued to study and write, especially mathematics, music or mechanics, in which the Pythagoreans were experts and they expressed themselves also about ethics, original economics and politics. Some of these Pythagorean philosophers reached a certain reputation in the homeland, so that Aristotle (384-322 BC) could acknowledge them as a philosophical school in his time[[2]](#endnote-2): the ´Pythagoreans´. Still later Pythagorean philosophers stayed productive in the city-states where they had come to settle themselves, although we do not know who wrote what. We only know of the continuity of Pythagoreanism because some of these later works became copied in Alexandria, which had become a cultural capital of the Greek world next to Athens.

In the first century AD, long after these later Pythagoreans, in Alexandria a neo-Pythagoreanism flourished. The philosophers in this city wrote books in a Pythagorean vein themselves. But in this city also many Pythagoreans of earlier date were transcribed and copied. A strange habit reined this publishing activity. Those transcribed and copied works used to be published under pseudonyms, often very enigmatic ones. ‘The bulk of pseudonymous and similar (Pythagorean DN) writings is by no means homogeneous. But it stands out fairly clearly against the pre-Platonic and pre-Aristotelian tradition on the one hand and, on the other, against the new traditions from the 1st century onwards, which is represented by the neo-Pythagoreans using their own name´[[3]](#endnote-3)*.* The names of those pseudonymous authors are usually put between ‘inverted commas’.

This mountain of pseudonymous works contained quite some papyri on economics, in the first place a work called *Oikonomikos* by ’´Bryson´. We know about the existence of these later male and female Pythagorean authors because of Stobaeus (Gr.: Іοαννης `ο Στοβαιος). He lived in Byzantium in the 5th century AD and compiled a huge series of extracts from Greek authors. His *Anthologies* preserve fragments of many authors and even complete works from Antiquity which otherwise might be unknown to us. In the chapter *Οικονομικος* Stobaeus had brought together several sentences and fragments of the works of playwrights, politicians and philosophers on the government of the house.

The two fragments he picked from the *Oikonomikos* by ‘Bryson’ do not betray the content of this book about government of the house, let be that he gives a true impression of the practical science of economics that ‘Bryson’ has presented. The next paragraph is a reproduction of the whole book, but from a version in Arab (!), because ‘Bryson’ has been the authority on original economics amongst the philosophers in the Arab world. The reader therefore must be aware that for this summary the *Oikonomikos* by ‘Bryson’ has been translated three times! The rendering in Arab must have been done by a Moslem, given the first line (*In the name of God, who mercifully takes care. He is my aid)* and the final one (*God alone be praised!).* Allah was inserted one more time in the text, when the author discusses sexual abstinence in the youth.This ensures *closeness to God –He be exalted! -,(--)*).Had ‘Bryson’ originally written *closeness to the gods*?It is more than probable.

Around 1925this neo-Pythagorean *Oikonomikos* became translated in German and the translator- Martin Plessner - must at least have replaced the word *Allah* by the word *God*. Finally I have rendered the German in English.

´Bryson´ fills out and discusses some elements of economics which Xenophon and Theophrastus had neglected. Without reading this Pythagorean economist it is impossible to get a complete overview of what the content of original economics in Antiquity has been.

**2. Summary of the *Oikonomikos* of `Bryson`**

***In the name of God, who mercifully takes care. He is my aid.***

*The book of Bryson about the government of the house by the man*

*He says: The matter of government of the house (Ar.: al rajal le manzileh) is complete by four properties. The first one is wealth (Ar.: al mâl); the second one the servants; the third one the wife and the fourth one the children* (p. 214[[4]](#endnote-4))

**Chapter 1. About wealth**

[Introduction: ‘Bryson´ starts his *Oikonomikos* with the management of goods and he takes his time to introduce this subject. Before he launches his theory about the management of goods, he first teaches the reader some biology, gives an exposé about the interconnectedness of arts and offers a theory of money. DN]

Man is a digesting being and therefore has to look for food. *He has to look for completion and replacement of what dissolves in him*. (p. 214) And therefore man stands in need of replacing and restoring what was dissolved from him. Each of his members extracts from the food, whatever it needs. Meat, bones and sinews get each fed in their own way and superfluous material is discharged. This happens in such a way and to such an extent that the members grow in a harmonious way and not too hard. Because he possesses different members, man needs different kinds of food, but all foods have in common that they originate from animals or plants, *because the food of everything originates from the things which stand closest to it, and to man exists nothing more closely than animals and plants.* (p. 215/6).

*The plants and animals both need certain kinds of arts[[5]](#endnote-5), to make them come into being and then - after they have come into being- perfect themselves.* (p. 216) After agriculture more arts are necessary for preparing the food and weaving cloths and so on. *And although the power to experience and the possibility to learn every art is put in man, because of the shortness of his existence the individual person does not have the possibility to discover or learn this* [all arts DN*], because by the experiencing and learning of one art he is kept from experiencing and learning the others*. (p. 216) *The arts, moreover, are connected to each other, like the builder who needs the carpenter, while the carpenter needs the art of the smith and the art of the smith needs the miner and he again the art of the builder. This way every individual art, although it is in itself complete, needs the others, like the parts of a chain need each other.* *And when one of the arts is removed*, *by its removal the other arts come to an end[[6]](#endnote-6).* (p. 216) So people need each other when they are providing for their own living. *That is the reason why people needed to construct cities and to live together in them to assist each other with the arts.* (p. 217)

{In p. 217, r. 15- 219, r. 23 ‘Bryson’ develops a theory of money.[[7]](#endnote-7)Not summarized DN}.

[The management of goods]

*Now we would like to explain the best way to manage wealth and we say: who looks at this, should look at three things; the acquisition of wealth, its preservation, and its expenditure (use)*. (p.219/20)

As to acquisition, *it is necessary to be aware that one should avoid injustice, outrage and lowness* (p. 220) Examples of injustice are paying with clipped coins, smuggling with measures, deliberately making mistakes in billing, denying other man’s rights and taking one’s rights without any righteous claim. *It will put a stop to acquisition, cut growth and bring poverty,* (p. 220) because of the loss of reputation that this sort of behaviour entails[[8]](#endnote-8) for his business friends will avoid him and start everybody to tell this low behaviour so that as well the people that have done business with him as those who have not yet entered into business relations will turn away from him.

*Examples of outrage are sneers and blows on the ear and similar things, which many a man endures to get something from people who practice such habits*. (p. 220)

*Lowness is when a man abandons the art which his ancestors and relatives have been carrying out, although he still has the abilities to practice it, in favour of a lower one,* (p. 220/1)like a general who becomes a flute player. The opposite is not true. The son, however, who sticks to the lower art, that his father performed, should not be reproached. It is no obligation to be ambitious. *When it would be an obligation for every man to look for an art higher than the one he inherited, than would the totality of humankind be obliged to strive for one particular art, the highest of the arts. That would cancel out the other arts.* (p. 221) and this would not work because the arts are interconnected as shown before.

*As to the subject of preservation, five things are necessary here. (p. 221)*

*The first is that what a man expends should not be greater than what he acquires. For when he does this, it does not take long before his wealth is consumed.*

*The second is that* *what he* *expends should not be equal to what he acquires*. (p. 222). Rather, he should save something of his acquisition, as a provision against the possibility of an accident, a disaster or a commercial loss. *It is actually law that a portion of his expenditure goes to the reserve capital.* (p. 222) The situation of the person who saves like the situation of a body that grows, while the person that maintains an equilibrium looks the body that is decreasing and running to its end. A body that grows feeds itself with more than which it digests. *And like a body which has grown old, is close to death, so comes the wealth from which is taken more than is added, fast to disappear*. (p 222)

The third is *that the man should be wary of undertaking something he is incapable of and incapable of sustaining.* (p. 223). He should not stretch his hand to what he is not able to handle properly, e.g. not buy a farm if he is not able to handle it himself or scattered fields for which he is missing the personnel or a herd for which he does not have sufficient financial means. *A person, who does this, may be compared with the greedy person who eats something that his stomach cannot digest*. (p. 223) It will not feed him but rather run straight out of him. This kind of damage is comparable with what happens to such a person. He will lose earnings as well as wealth.

The fourth is not to *put one’s money in objects of which the sale takes a long time and without which most of the people can do,* *like precious stones or books, which are only bought by kings or books that are only bought by scholars*.(p. 223/4)

The fifth is *that the man should be fast with selling goods, but slow with the sale of real estate, even if the earnings from the former are small, while his earnings from the latter are large.*  (p. 224)

[´Bryson´ finally discusses the third element of the management of goods, the use of them. He first shows five ways of using one’s wealth wrongly. The bullets points are mine.]

*As to the expenditure of wealth one must avoid five things: miserliness, meanness, profligacy, extravagance and bad government.* (p. 224)

* One acts as a miser if *one holds back on spending on the categories of the proper, like on supporting the relations; doing good to friends and clients and donating to the distressed according to one’s possibilities and to what one can afford* (p. 224)
* Mean is to keep essential foods and materials away from his direct family.
* Profligacy consists of being engrossed in lusts and pleasures
* Extravagance is buying more than what people of one`s class usually do.
* *Bad government is when the man fails to apportion his expenditures in evenness, in order to spend on every kind of them as is justified (--) and when he is not able to acquire a good at the moment it is needed.* (p. 225)

These five attitudes all frustrate the managerial activities of the governor of the house, be it to a different degree. The miser is undone because he does not know the good and the excellence it contains, the stingy man because he is not aware of his obligations. Both are hated by their fellow-men, because they are standing almost on a fundament of injustice. But they still are in the situation that they can make an earning from their wealth. The profligate, who prefers pleasure over the use of reason, is rebuked and detested. People who are rebuked and detested do not profit from their associations. If the profligate chooses not to associate himself with others, he positions himself close the realm of the death. But his advantage is that he is still enjoying pleasures. The extravagant is worse off than the miser, the mean and the profligate, because he has no wealth to preserve or pleasure to enjoy*. Worst of all is the condition of the man who is a bad planner, because he becomes punished while he does not know the measure to and right time of the expenditures.* (p. 226)

The proper user of goods is:

* Someone who recognizes the categories of the good and acknowledges them as binding for his spending,
* And when expending for his pleasures keeps to the mean,
* And keeps himself with his purchases to the standards of his class,
* And knows the time when needs arise which means that acquisitions are not done too early and decay and rot are prevented or nothing is passed till after the date he needed it. This postponing makes the too early acquisition worthless or leads to an acquisition at its peak moment, which is prohibitively expensive.

*Thus when one keeps oneself to what is required to do or to refrain from, then one gets the credits for noble-mindedness, liberality, power to achieve, willingness to sacrifice, self-assuredness, freedom, and the moral beauty of one’s conduct and sustenance* (p. 227):

*And the person who is this way, should not look for more, once his harvest yields or his profits are enough for his expenditures for his bodily well-being and the care of his family and something is left, of which he spends a part on his relatives, friends and clients and another part on the poor and beggars and saves something to have a backing against fortune and its changes. Because to look for more than this is avarice*. (p. 227)

**Chapter 2. About slaves and mamluks.[[9]](#endnote-9)**

*Three kinds of slaves exist: slaves according to slave law, slaves of desire and slaves by nature. A slave according to law by (the institution of) servitude is the one for whom the law determines that he is a slave. The slave of desire is the person who does not control himself, because his desires and wisher are stronger than himself. Those who are like that are bad people and bad slaves and are good for nothing. The slave by nature has a strong body and endures toil. He has no discernment in himself (between good and bad), and there is no sign of intelligence in him except to the extent that he is obedient to another, but without reaching the point of being able to manage himself. In his nature he is close to the beasts, which men dispose of as they wish. Somebody who is like this, even if he is free, is still a slave, and the best thing for him is to have a master to manage him*.[[10]](#endnote-10) (p. 228)

*Slaves and mamluks are needed for several things: some of them are wanted for overseeing the house; some of them for valeting and serving and some of them one wants for the rough labour tasks.* Someone *who wants to buy a mamluk should examine him*. (p. 228) If a slave according to slave law is a slave of desire too, he actually already has a master: his desires. He should therefore not be bought. *When the slave is free in nature, his soul is strong and his body is lithe, than he belongs to those who one may entrust with overseeing and custody.* *And when he is free in nature, his soul is gentle and docile, and his body spotless than he belongs to those who one trusts with valeting and serving. And when he is slave by nature, than he is entrusted with labours, for which one needs force and endurance*. (p. 229) The overseers may be compared with the senses, the servants and valets with the hands and the slaves by nature with the legs. *Therefore the man must protect his slaves as he protects his limb*s *and this implies to be conscious of two things:* (p. 230) (a) slaves are of the some humane race as he is. This will make him aware, that if he treats them as himself, his soul not only will acquire virtue but he will get the love of his slaves, of whom he happens to be the owner, and (b) slaves have suffered. Empathy requires that they are treated with kindness.

*If the mamluk makes errors, the governor should overlook it one time and reprimand at the second time. And to be precise: he first sets him right by reproach, admonition and warning, and when he does it again by rage, and when he returns (to the error) by blows. But he should not punish him for an error, which he made unintentionally and not on purpose; on the other hand he should not neglect to repay him for a mistake that he made from anger and wickedness*. (p. 230/1) When the servant has acted wrongly, one should punish him in the same way as his children for an identical mistake.

Times have to be set for the servants to relax. A servant may be compared with a bow. When it is left strung, it becomes loose, while it is effective when stretched at the right moment. *We are really astonished by the people who we see busy with their cattle and are intent on its relaxation and good treatment, without giving their mamluks their share in this.* (p. 231) The mamluk furthermore is of the same species as his owner, so the owner should always have compassion, because he is aware of the weakness of his mamluk. *Therefore he should not force a mamluk to acknowledge that he has no other choice than to follow his (owner’s) commands, if he likes it or not.* *Rather he should try to achieve that the work is done with affection, pleasure and zeal. Finally, one must be keen to ensure that the obedience of his mamluk more is due to respect as to fear and more to love as to the acceptance of subjugation.* (p. 232)

The finest servants are young, because they pick up easy what should be learned and they retain the required habits. Usually the best mamluks do not belong to one´s own people, *since people love to despise and envy those related to them (--).* (p. 232)

*It belongs to the rights of a mamluk that he will obtain everything that he needs sufficiently and that he will not be forced to do what he is not capable of or what is defended by law to him.* *But he is obliged to submission* (p. 233) and if he does not obey the suggested punishment will follow. Mamluks should have ranks so that it is possible to degrade or promote them. The promotion of one of them acts as a spur to the rest.

**[Chapter 3. About the wife[[11]](#endnote-11)]**

*We say that thus purpose consists of two things, the one from reason, the other from nature*. (p. 233).

Reason says that most of the activities of the male are outside the house, so he needs somebody who protects and governs what is in the house during his absence. Nobody is able to care for the property of somebody else as he cares for his own. *Therefore it is the best thing for the male to have a partner in his house, for whom the property is in the same way her own as for him and who therefore takes care in the same way as he and whose government of it is the same as his[[12]](#endnote-12).* (p. 234)

*The second category, which Nature determines, consists of the fact that the Creator – let him be praised and exalted! - has made man mortal, it is true, but because of the continuity of the world has decided to make him capable of procreation till a certain age and has made procreation to exist of something, which unites heat and moistness.*(p. 234) Warmth is used for growth and moistness for moulding. Moistness cannot exist along warmth because warmth destroys moistness, so neither the male (warmth) nor the female (moistness) may produce their own kind of children. *So when the male acquires in the female that of warmth, of which the Creator has decided that from it the child comes into existence and this warmth tries to complement itself with the moistness of the female, in which lies the perfection of creation, the child is completed.*

*To this perfect Divine disposition has to be added that the male is from nature inclined to moving, exposing himself and acting independently and therefore needs a deputy in the property, while the female from nature is inclined to peace and concealment*. (p. 235) This way she complements him with the endurance he is does not possess but which is necessary for getting attached to the house and he complements her with the mobility which she does not have but is necessary to find the vital necessities.

Finallythe creator *has put between both of them that (amount of) of friendship[[13]](#endnote-13) and solidarity, at which envy, rivalry and parsimony of each of them towards the partner fall away* (p. 235*)* with regard to the part of the money which comes from the one and which may be governed by the other. If this (friendship and solidarity) would come to an end then each partner could claim from the other more than from any other person, because of the association, the companionship and the capability to take away [the goods of the other DN] *Rather He has made both as if they are one person.* (p. 236)

*That is why it is the obligation of the woman to comply with the man and to submit to him and to show humbleness towards what he commands her, because he has given her his house and property and has made her its owner and has nothing withdrawn from it for himself.* (p. 236) This is a favour of him for which she should be grateful. Even if she argues that this gift was in his interest as well, it does not follow that the gift has not taken place and that she should not consider how to return her gratitude.

*The man therefore when he marries the woman, should explain to her why he wanted her[[14]](#endnote-14) and that he not just wanted her for the children but as well for the care of him and the control over his matters, when he is present and when he is absent and when he is healthy and when he is ill, and the protection of all his wealth [[15]](#endnote-15) and the assistance of him at all his affairs and at all that which he has to achieve for them.* (p. 237)

When selecting a wife*, the man should not look for rank, money or beauty in the woman.* (p. 237) The reason for this is that once he has found out that she possesses those, the woman sees that he has achieved what he desired from her and nothing remains which she needs in order to get close to him, which makes her careless about the government of the house. Rather he is willing to submit to her. *This way the government of the house goes to ruins, because of the two owners the lower standing one comes to stay on the position of the more excellent one.* (p. 237) Power fights will follow between the two partners. With fighting comes absence from work and with this ruination. *For* *the house is nothing more than the most excellent of the family being the head of the rest of the family and the rest of the family listening to him and obeying him*. (p. 238)

*We already have* *explained the two purposes for which the woman is sought: children and the government of the house (*. 238) What is required to achieve these two goals?[[16]](#endnote-16)As to the children, they need to acquire two things from the future wife: soundness of build and soundness of mind. Without these two there is no nobility. *As to the government of the house, (she needs) many virtues*: (p. 239*)*

1. intelligence and acumen;
2. bodily and mental power, leading to the taming of the soul and the liberation of desires;
3. humility, to be used in the relation with her husband;
4. tenderness, to be practiced in her relation with her children and
5. fairness, to be practiced in her relations with the slaves.

*So you see, that you will not find any of the virtues the man needs that the woman does not need to the same degree or even to a greater degree, because she is weaker and needs the acquisition of virtues more.* *And because not every soul absorbs the virtues by education, the husband should endeavour to take someone, who helps him with taking in the virtues by nature, so that it becomes possible for him to build on what he has and to augment it*. (p. 239) The government of the house will not turn out right, if not the character of the woman corresponds with the character and manner of the male, which is only the case if both are honest, just like a straight wood only will match another straight wood, while curved wood will not fit either straight or curved wood.

That does why both male and female need to be reasonable, moderate and fair. *If both are not like that, they do not fit and the affairs of the house go to ruins.* (p. 240) *Who doubts what we have said - that in the wife all virtues have to be present - should be aware that no doubt exists about the fact that she is deputy and governess of the house, and she thinks about what keeps goodness for it and is put in charge to govern those who are in the house, servants and so on.* (p. 240)

* *Can government be successful without somebody who possesses reason and knowledge?[[17]](#endnote-17)*
* *Can government be successful without somebody who possesses benevolence and thoughtfulness?*
* *Can goodness arise without precision and attentiveness?*
* *Is the beauty of achievement being found without ingenuity and smartness?* (p 240/1)
* Is this all accomplished without keeping the soul in check and declining pleasures and lusts? Who is capable of keeping the house in check, if she is not able to keep in check herself? Who will take the trouble for that what keeps the house in goodness, who is hampered by pleasures and lusts?
* Who will reign the person under her who is not able to reign herself?
* *Who would be consequent, who has no stamina* (p. 241*)*
* Who would bear the education of children and the service to the husband without possessing patience?
* *Would anybody come forward except the one who has in her soul the strength and mental power to make this easier?*
* *And would anybody endure power except the one for whom fairness and justice are unimportant? For one cannot say that between the wife and her husband and between her and her children reigns harmony, except when she accepts better that they exercise power over her than that she exercise power over them and bears their anger, peevishness, (and arbitrariness) in their times of sorrow or illness, and further tells them that all that is her fault and not of them (husband and children), does not continue to reproach them and does not stay angry in her soul.* (p. 241/2) The point is that her sympathy and compassion make it possible to acknowledge the situations that brought them to this nasty behavior and excuses them. *She has pity because of this, experiences them (those situations) as painful en wishes that she will not experience them herself, not because she loathes something they did but from concern for them (husband and children) and from pity about all those things that brought them disadvantage and changed their situation. (*p. 242)
* Which soul is completer than this one, in which all these characteristics are united?

*And when these qualities are united in the wife than she is happy for herself and her husband and children are happy because of her; her family is held in honour because of her and she becomes an example for other women.* (p. 242)

**[Chapter 4. About children]**

The child born from free people with a healthy body and a healthy mind is usually the best. This descent lays a sound basis for his education and his later development. So one should start with his education when he is young, because the small child is obedient and not yet in the habit of not listening to his parents. When *he has become accustomed to something, and grows up with it, be it good or bad, it will never leave him*. *Therefore when he becomes accustomed when he is a boy to proper habits en praiseworthy actions, he will stick to them and will, once he understands them, still make them augment.* (p. 243) It is indeed very difficult to change someone, who already has become accustomed to his wrong natural inclinations and to bad habits. Countless times I – says ‘Bryson’ - have seen such attempts by people *who knew that their habits were bad and to whom the good habits were not unknown* (p. 244) seen come to nothing. Often I have observed too, that children, who maintained good habits under the guidance of their parents and tutors, once their educators fell away, set off in the most worse direction.

*There is not any cause, which has more power in this respect than the habits of boyhood*. (p. 244) If he has a bad nature and moreover gets used to bad habits, he will never get rid of these habits. In the opposite case where the boy is excellent from nature and one is walking with him the path of getting him used to the good, the good will take root. *In the case between these two, that is to say that he is good from nature but put to do bad things or left in the company of those who practice them, or on the other hand is bad from nature but he is brought to the good or sees somebody who practises it.* (p. 245) then it might be possible to put him back on the right road. Favourable for a successful education are three character traits: *sense of shame, love of honour and magnanimity.* (p. 245) If the boy possesses them he is easy to educate. It will become just a matter of praising and blaming him. If the boy misses them, educating him is difficult. *One should such a boy, when he misbehaves, frighten and threaten, then, when frightening does not help, give him blows and also when he behaves well treat him well.* (p. 245).

*The boy should be observed in every situation in which he is his eating, drinking, sleeping, sitting, rising, moving, speaking and all that. About all these activities he should be taught to avoid unseemliness and to strive for the appropriate.* (p. 246) If both concepts will be established in his soul, he will be able to apply them in other activities as well.

As to eating[[18]](#endnote-18) he should not push the food forward; gaze at it like an insatiable person, because that is what swine do; not take food before older people; not take more than one’s portion or more dishes at the same time; not eat fast or with large bites; not smut himself; not lick his fingers, not be the last with his fingers in the food and not stare at others at the table.

*The boy should be made to understand that one needs food in the same way as medicine.* (p. 247) One does not eat for enjoyment or for quantity’s sake but rather to the degree that it is useful. When somebody asks him some portion, he should give it freely because this way he learns to tame his desires, and is taught generosity and pleasantness. *He should get used to be satisfied with the simplest food and to restrict himself to bread without filling, because this habit helps him to master continence, self-restraint and his longing for money. The longing for money already is worthy of disapproval in itself and to this has to be added that it often leads to its acquisition by disgraceful means, when honest means* *are not successful* (p. 247) This being satisfied with simple food is praiseworthy in the poor and the rich, but in the rich who have a wider choice, it is a sign of greater worth. He should not eat each time so much that he is completely satiated in order to prevent that he becomes lazy or sleepy during the day and cannot take in the education. This rule goes for the adults as well. They can easier keep to it if they have been accustomed to it in their youth. *His main food should not be meat and large pieces. Putting these aside is better for sharpness of mind and bodily health, and further for of rapid growth, because heavy food make´s one´s nature heavy and prevents it from developing*. *And the boy* *should get used to eat only a little of sweets and fruits, because this (self-limitation) is more useful for his soul and his body: his soul, because (when he eats many sweets and fruits,) luxury and the love for pleasure take the upper hand over him; his body, because of the speed of the conversion of sweet things and the fruits and their going sour in the warm body.* (p. 248) The boy should get used to only drink after the meal. This helps to tame the soul and moreover the body can digest the food better, which will be strengthened by it. *Any person with some experience understands this, knowledgeable physicians advise it, and those who take wine are familiar with it.* (p. 249) Finally the boy should eat when he is ready with his lessons and fairly tired. If he, however, comes in the habit of eating slyly during the day, this should be forbidden to him.

*The boy should be accustomed not to drink water with his food, certainly not in the summer, because if he drinks, the food becomes heavy, his body becomes languid and lazy, the meal is speedily consummated in his stomach, and he is in need of more. In the winter waters cools his body too much*. (p. 249) He should restrain himself from drinking, when he is learning or in the presence of somebody who demands his respect. The boy *should not come near the narcotic drink, till he is a man, because it damages his body and his soul: his body because it heats him, while he does not need the heat because of his own warmth; his soul, because, when the narcotic drink already changes the intellect of the experienced man and brings him folly and temper and angry thoughts and insolence and frivolity, this will most certainly arrive to the boy.* (p. 250) He should not be present at drinking-bouts of the adult men, whatever class these people are.

As to sleeping, the boy must be prevented from sleeping for his pleasure, because this harms his body and his soul. He should not sleep directly after meals. He should awaken at dawn and then go to the toilet. *A man should awaken at dawn as well and when a man has been accustomed to it in his youth, it is easier for him.* (p. 251) The boy must be prevented from sleeping during the day. The same goes for sleeping in the presence of other people, because this is a disgrace and shows his lack of self-control and inability to keep pleasure at a distance. He should not sleep on a soft bed, because the boy has to become hardened and his soul has to become firm.

As to *moving, it is really better that a boy experiences some of the cold in the winter and some of the heat in the summer than that he experiences nothing of them.* *When nothing of them touches him, his body will become delicate and frail and his soul likewise soft and weak*. (p. 251) For the same reason he should walk, run, ride and take exercise. The boy should not be accustomed to wear soft, fine clothing, because this is something for women and effeminates. Neither should one give him the impression that clothing is important. *This would lead him to love of money and we have already declared that love of money is bad in itself and leads to something worse than itself* (p. 252) He should wear a cloak and carry his arms. *Revealing the arm is an act of insolence, and letting his hands hang slack is a sign of contempt for people..* (p. 252) He should not move too fast or too slow. Hurry indicates recklessness and slowness pride and idleness. He should not grow his hair long. The boy should not be fitted with women´s adornments. *Rather, one should make him realize the disgrace of effeminate behaviour and the aim of someone who practices it.* *One should make him hate the idea of looking like women and love the idea of looking like men.* (p. 252) In principle he should not wear a ring. Let him not boast of something he possesses in front of someone who does not have it. *He should be allowed to boast of his culture and learning and be permitted to compete on the basis of them.* (p. 253)

As to rising and sitting, he should honour – that is stand up from his seat for them – older people, the poor as much as the rich and anyone who is superior to him in culture and in knowledge, whatever his age. He should not spit, blow his nose, yawn, belch and so on in the presence of others He should sit properly, that is not to put one leg over the other or lay his head on his arm, *because the last posture shows that his enervation and weakness has already come so far, that he cannot support his head.* (p. 253) This then will happen on moments of worry, depression or weakness too.

As to speaking*, it is better for the boy that he does not swear an oath on God about truth of falseness. A man should not do this either but he is often forced to it but for a boy there is no reason for an oath.* (p. 254) This will teach him later to use oaths sparingly. He should be accustomed to not taking the word when adults are talking and only speak when asked and listen attentively to what older people have to say, because he can learn from it. *And it is necessary to forbid the boy to speak about slanderous matters and to take care that he does not hear them from somebody else* (p*.* 254) If he considers them objectionable he will end up avoiding slandering. *For this reason, the boy must be warned against keeping the company of boys, who are bold and forward*. (p. 254) It is moreover required that is not allowed to scold and curse and *gets accustomed to pleasurable discourse and friendly behaviour and when he has made mistakes he should only hear reproaches from them who are trying to educate him.* (p. 255) It is most important, however, that he learns to speak the truth and to avoid lying. *If the boy tells a lie, he must be reprimanded, blamed, rebuked and beaten, if necessary*[[19]](#endnote-19) *(*p. 255) Telling the truth is the best of virtues and whoever gets accustomed to grows up with lies will not prosper.

[ ‘Bryson’ mentions still six more matters (*all that*) that should be taught to the boy: taking service outside the house; bearing punishment, learning generosity, and developing an aversion to gold and silver; playing often but rather in an educational setting and finally staying away from sex. DN]

*It is required that the boy gets used to wait upon/serve himself and his parents and his tutors and whoever is older than him* (p. 255)Poor children learn this automatically*.* In this regard the children of the rich have a problem. If they are not admonished to serve during their education, no cause makes them do it. This effort however is worth its while. It trains the boy and imparts manliness and experience, accustoms him to modesty, earns him affection and in this way he becomes ready for the changes of fate.

*It is good for the boy that when the teacher beats him, he does not cry, yell or beg because that is a sign of weakness and cowardice, permitted to a slave but not to a free person.* (p. 256) The boy must be disciplined in order to avoid envious and oppressive behaviour and he must be learned to be eager to compete in learning. The boy should furthermore get accustomed to generosity in such a way that he will be proud to be the best in it. *It should be such that none of his comrades will please him with something without that he himself pleases his comrade with the same or more of it; that he does not take something and give less in return and that his comrade loves him more than he loves him. It is proper for someone who is worthy of honour to please with more than with what one is pleased and to give more than one receives and for people who strive for love it is proper to love more than they are loved themselves. But if it is not possible for the boy to repay the favour of his comrade in the same way as he was pleased by him, he has to find a means to return this favour in a different way.* (p. 256/7)Otherwise, he does not stick to justice and people will hold against him to love for the sake of profit instead of for the sake of honour. He should also be accustomed to hating gold and silver, more than snakes, because snakes only poison the body but gold and silver poison the soul and the damage done by gold and silver to the soul is larger than the damage of viperous poison to the body. *One should look for means to decrease their significance for him and to make him despise the people who love both (gold and silver).* (p. 257)

The boy should often be allowed to play. Playing is meant to relax the boy, so that he may learn better afterwards. The games, however, should not involve disgrace or suffering. The most excellent virtue to be accustomed to for the boy and the most effective for achieving success is obedience to his parents, his teacher and educated people. Any boy who fails to show reverence, respect and veneration to them will be slow to achieve success.

*It is good for the boy to be afraid of sexual intercourse or obtaining knowledge of any aspect of sexual intercourse or coming near to it before he is married. Apart from the fact that this (abstinence) ensures closeness to God –He be exalted! -, good repute among men, bodily health, proper growth, maintenance of purity and cleanliness, and self-control, (comes the argument) that if the man does not know a woman apart from his own woman and the woman does not know a man apart from her husband, the friendship[[20]](#endnote-20) of each one of them for the other partner is the greatest friendship there is. His heart hangs only on her and her heart only on him. This is one of the most beneficial of things for as well the man as the woman jointly. If (already) those who seek firmness of body forbear from sexual intercourse and choose the former over the latter, then those who seek virtue in their soul have all the more reason to abstain from it.*

*Who pays attention to these matters and acts accordingly, achieves virtuousness, receives love and honour from God and humankind and reaches the highest happiness*. (p. 259) The opposite is true as well. *That brings him to very much poverty and a low status*. (p. 259) And in his later life, when it is too late for corrections, he will acknowledge, what he should have learned in his youth. A little mistake in the beginning and at the roots of things has large negative consequence in later life. The opposite is true as well.

*The treatise of the philosopher ´Bryson´ on the government of the house is finished! God alone be praised!* (p. 259)

1. Leonid Zmuth, *Pythagoras and the early Pythagoreans*, Oxford (Oxford University Press) 2012, p. 146. This book is an translation in English of the first edition of 1994, which is in Russian. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The best known Pythagorean philosophers are: Philolaos of Croton (470-390 BC), his disciple Eurytus (fl. 400 BC) and Archytas of Tarentum (420-350 BC). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. H. Thesleff: *An introduction to the Pythagorean writings*, Åbo (Åbo Akademi) 1961, p. 2 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. The pages refer to Plessner ’s translation. See for the particularities the *Justification* on this website-page [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. ‘Bryson’ seems to suggest here that there are several agricultural arts. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. This fragment in grey is translated from Stobaeus, not from Plessner. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Interesting as it, I have left this part out, because it belongs to Politics and Ethics, that is to say Aristotle discusses it in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and his *Politics.* In the Middle Ages and later money also will be discussed in the comments on these two books. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. `Bryson` extensively shows the way along which a reputation gets lost.. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Plessner writes *Die Sklaven und die Eigenen.* The Arab version has *wal ‘abd al-mamluk*. Mamluks were slaves with a higher status than the ordinary ones. They for instance were bought for military service. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. This fragment in grey is translated from Stobaeus, not from Plessner. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Ritter does not write *Chapter 3* here; this is my additions just like *Chapter 4* later on in this *Oikonomikos*. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. This argument will be used in a summarized way by Ibn Sina in his *Letter on Politics*. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Ritter has ‘love’, where I have given friendship. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. One will remember that in Xenophon`s book on economics, Isomachus just does that. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. The protection of the capital of the house will be mentioned by Ibn Sina. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. ´Bryson´ argues for the second time why the man should not look for rank, wealth and beauty in a future wife. I have left this long argument away, because according to the experts it very much looks like a later addition by somebody else. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. The bullet points are mine [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. The underling in this paragraph is by me, for clearness sake. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. `Bryson` wants beating to be a measure of the last resort. Earlier in this chapter he had said that *a child, when he misbehaves, should be frightened and threatened, and his misbehaviour should be stressed by blows, when frightening does not help.* Here he discusseslying and to suppress this one should use successively *reprimanding, reproaching, taunting and even beating.* [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Ritter has two times ‘love’ for the word which I take to be ‘friendship’ in this sentence. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)