

# "WHY THALES KNEW THE PYTHAGOREAN THEOREM: RE-VIEWING THE ORIGINS OF GREEK GEOMETRY AND PHILOSOPHY"

with Professor Robert A. Hahn

March 12th at 3:30pm

[Click here for the Zoom registration link.](#)

The publication of Burkert's *Lore and Wisdom in Ancient Pythagoreanism* [1962/72] galvanized an avalanche of scholarly consensus away from "Pythagoras the Mathematician" and discredited the connection of Pythagoras with the famous theorem that bears his name. Burkert had shown that the ancient testimonies alleging Pythagoras' mathematical achievements were too late to be trustworthy. More recently, Zhmud [2012] has argued that Burkert was too hasty in dismissing "Pythagoras the Mathematician," and his arguments show that even in the fifth, fourth, and third centuries BCE there are trustworthy doxographical reports certifying Pythagoras' mathematical interests and even a reference to a diagram revealing a geometrical discovery/proof, possibly of the hypotenuse theorem. I think that Zhmud has it right, but I propose to follow the geometrical diagrams to show that even before Pythagoras, Thales had visualized, if not proved, the hypotenuse theorem. Thales arguably knew the theorem, and the "big picture" places Thales in the broader technological context of modular thinking. Geometry supplied an answer to the underlying structure of diverse appearances, and hence the connection between the origins of geometry and philosophy in Greece.

Robert A. Hahn is a Professor of Philosophy and Director of Ancient Legacies Seminars to Greece, Turkey, and Egypt at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

The talk is presented by the Program in Classics, Philosophy and Ancient Science at the University of Pittsburgh



University of  
Pittsburgh