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Where Epistemology and Religion Meet What do(es) the god(s) look like?¹

Abstract: The focus of this essay is on Xenophanes' criticism of anthropomorphic representation of the gods, famously sounding like a declaration of war against a constituent part of the Greek religion, and adopting terms and a tone that are unequalled amongst "pre-Socratic" authors for their directness and explicitness. While the main features of Xenophanes' polemic are well known thanks to some of the most studied fragments of the pre-Socratic tradition, a different line of enquiry from the usual one is attempted by considering the multi-layered background of the religious beliefs revolving around the idea that the gods have human form as outlined in the tradition of epic poetry or represented in cult statues: in the light of this consideration Xenophanes' text can take on some new characteristics.

In the second part of the article, emphasis is put on the importance of the correlation Xenophanes established between the issue of the *appearance of the gods* and that of the *certainty of knowledge*, in terms that have exerted tremendous influence on later thought, most notably on Plato in the *Timaeus*.

Keywords: Greek Religion, Greek Epistemology, Greek Epic Poetry, Presocratics, Sophists, Divine Epiphanies, Anthropomorphism, Herodotus.

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This paper is primarily concerned with Xenophanes' criticism of anthropomorphic representation of the gods. My decision might appear both predictable in the context of this conference and yet rather unfruitful. On the one hand, Xenophanes' polemic against anthropomorphism sounds indeed like a declaration of war against a constituent part of Greek religion, and adopts terms and a tone that are unequalled amongst "pre-Socratic" authors for their directness and explicitness. On the other hand, the principal features of this polemic are well known thanks

¹ I wish to thank Luigi Battezzato, Mauro Bonazzi, and Bruce Lincoln for some useful pointers, and the other participants to the Symposium for their probing comments on that occasion.

to some of the most studied fragments of the pre-Socratic tradition. However, I will attempt here to follow a different line of enquiry from the usual one, by considering in the first place the manner of portraying the gods in the tradition of epic poetry. And in the light of these considerations in the first part of my paper, Xenophanes' text can take on some new characteristics. In the second part of my paper, I will make a few remarks of a different kind in emphasizing the fact that the question of the *appearance of the gods* is crucial to Xenophanes' reflection on the *certainty of knowledge*. He thus establishes a major theoretical correlation that would obtain an important following during the age of Plato and the Sophists. With specific reference to Plato, I will attempt to track the line of thought on the knowledge of god that was originated with Xenophanes in a passage of the *Timaeus*.

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B23 is an excellent place to start, because in it we find together the two essential and complementary aspects of Xenophanes' reflections on the gods, all within the concise sequence of two hexameters. The affirmation that there is a single god whose power raises him up above the gods and men is accompanied by the clarification of the attributes that turn this god into something *qualitatively* unique. Indeed he does not resemble any mortal creature either in the form of his body or in the manner of his thinking.

εἷς θεός, ἔν τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνθρώποισι μέγιστος,
οὔτι δέμας θνητοῖσιν ὁμοῖος οὐδὲ νόημα.

One god, greatest among gods and men,
in no way similar to mortals either in body or in thought.²

I will not dwell upon Xenophanes' "monotheism", a question that has been discussed at great length and with considerable passion, except to emphasize one point of importance in the development of my arguments. In the first line of the fragment, the reference to the «gods» in the plural is often interpreted as merely formulaic or as a careless concession to «popular religious terminology».³

² Unless otherwise stated, the translations of the fragments of pre-Socratic authors have been taken from Kirk-Raven-Schofield (1983), with the occasional alteration.

³ For example, Kirk-Raven-Schofield (1983), p. 170.

Quite the opposite, this reference could indicate that Xenophanes was working on the concept of the sovereignty of a single god in relation to the other gods, which is documented in all the ancient polytheisms. In polytheistic religions from Babylonia to Egypt and India, reflections on the unitary essence of the divine are far from unknown, and henotheistic views developed in wisdom literature normally co-existed without conflict with the polytheism of the worship (except in a few exceptional episodes, such as Akhenaton's monotheistic "revolution" in Egypt), and were strongly supportive of the political institutions (the gods of the various pantheons were lords or ladies of the cities whose government they shared out).⁴ Greek polytheism was no exception, and in epic poetry, where its main features are shaped, there is scope for the status of Zeus as 'sovereign' or 'father' of the gods and humanity (Homer, *Il.* II.350, II.669, VIII.31ff, 49, XIX.258; Hes. *Theog.* 886, 897, 923; *Op.* 668), his association with immense strength (μέγιστε, *Il.* II.412; κράτος ... μέγιστον, *Od.* V.4) and his all-seeingness (Hes. *Op.* 267: πάντα ἰδὼν Διὸς ὀφθαλμὸς καὶ πάντα νοήσας). This line of thought can be found throughout ancient and classical Greek culture, and I would like to recall the take on this expressed by Pindar, a contemporary of Xenophanes: τί θεός; ὅτι τὸ πᾶν (fr. 140d M). In any event, Xenophanes seems to prefer continuity to dissent on this point, in adopting a view that he could find in Homer and Hesiod,⁵ and this attenuates the polemical quality of the relationship of the rhapsode Xenophanes to his *auctores*.

Xenophanes did not intend to abandon the traditional context of hexametric poetry; if anything, he wished to reform it. This impression is confirmed by B1, the lengthy elegy that depicts the scene of a "moralised" banquet inspired by religious composure, where neither the traditional invitation to sing hymns to 'god' (l. 13), nor the exhortation to drink while avoiding excess (ὕβρις, l. 17) are forgotten. Only after having prepared this setting with great diplomacy does Xenophanes allow himself a highly personal and intentionally innovative remark, praising those who, after the wine, prefer to make speeches urging virtue rather than telling stories of no educational value on 'battles of Titans and Giants and Centaurs, fictions of the ancients' or on struggles between political

⁴ See Assmann (2004).

⁵ Of this opinion, for example, Babut (1974) (arguing that, on other points as well, Xenophanes is engaged in a purification and radicalization of elements of "theology" which were already latent in Homer and Hesiod); Leshner (1992), pp. 98–100; Heitsch (1994), p. 17; Broadie (1999), pp. 210–211; Drozdek (2007), pp. 24–25. Kahn (1997), pp. 251–253, makes some good points on the meaning of *theos* and its not designating an individual but a kind of thing, and on the "henotheism" of Greek philosophers, of whom he mentions Aristotle, Xenophanes, and Heraclitus.

factions (ll. 21–24).⁶ We may guess that he introduced his critique of religious anthropomorphism with equal tact, in cleverly gauged contexts whose complexity we are no longer able to catch. This takes nothing away from the devastating effect that his criticisms must have produced: indeed I would say that it was on this point, rather than on the question of unity of the divine, that Xenophanes struck at a central feature of the Greek religious experience, which had primarily drawn on both Homer’s theatre of divine enterprises and Hesiod’s theogonic system. Herodotus provides an excellent understanding of Homer’s and Hesiod’s role in defining the divine figures in a renowned passage which we will examine below. In modern studies, there are repeated references to and confirmations of the ancient historian’s discerning judgment, and there are no doubts about epic poetry being the place where the Greek gods were conceived, and silhouettes and stories developed to offer material and themes for vase painters and sculptors. This forged a collective sense of a space for interaction between mankind and the gods, which came to co-exist with the more ancient sense (inherited from the Mycenaean and Minoan eras) of some arcane, numinous and mysteriously diffused presence, alien to any iconic representation.⁷

I will only briefly mention B11 and B12, in which the critique is of what might be called the “overly human” representation of the gods by Homer and Hesiod, as this attributed them with unbecoming behaviour. In fact, this critique is part of an explicit programme of moralization, and its history is more straightforward and well known. It could even be defined as a success story. Suffice it to consider that Plato developed this theme in *Republic* II (377E–378E) in the context of what he called an ‘ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry’: a quarrel which, as has already been argued,⁸ started with Xenophanes (this judgement must of course be qualified by the observation that Xenophanes spoke as a poet within the highly traditional context of the symposium). Here, however, I wish to concentrate on Xenophanes’ criticism of *physical* anthropomorphism, which is very effectively condensed in B14.

ἀλλ’ οἱ βροτοὶ δοκέουσι γεννᾶσθαι θεούς,
τὴν σφετέρην δ’ ἔσθῆτα ἔχειν φωνήν τε δέμας τε.

But mortals consider that the gods are born, and that they have clothes and speech and bodies like their own (B14).

⁶ For a reappraisal of the polemical force of these lines in their context, see Lanza (2005), pp. 111–113.

⁷ See Burkert (1997).

⁸ Most (1999), pp. 336–337.

The main source for the belief that the gods resemble and dress like humans was of course Homer, ‘according to whom all have learnt since the beginning’ (ἔξ ἀρχῆς καθ’ Ὅμηρον ἐπεὶ μεμαθήκασι πάντες, B10). For this reason, an examination of Homeric descriptions of divine epiphanies could help us to contextualize the targets of Xenophanes’ attacks and his motives for them.⁹ As we know, the world of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is teeming with gods who appear before men and women in unpleasant circumstances – for example on the battlefield or when there is an inability to take a decision – in order to shield their protégés or to guide their actions with suggestions and encouragement. When referring to these appearances, the Greeks used the verb φαίνεσθαι with its various prefixes (the most common compound being ἐπιφαίνεσθαι), which connoted a direct and manifest revelation. However, gods and goddesses are not particularly fond of appearing to mortals, and they do not explicitly manifest themselves to just anyone (οὐ γὰρ πω πάντεσσι θεοὶ φαίνονται ἐναργεῖς, *Od.* XVI.161). They do so only when they want and to whom they want. Occasionally they surround themselves with a thick mist (as when Apollo swoops down on Patroclus in *Il.* XVI.788ff), or manifest themselves simply through their voice (a particularly sonorous one) with advice and commands. They often appear in dreams (in this case, the dream is the epiphany).¹⁰ They occasionally take on animal forms both in the conscious world and in dreams (for example, birds or wild beasts), but more often they have a human form and take on the features of a specific individual (Poseidon rouses the Argives by assuming Calchas’ body and voice, *Il.* XIII.43ff – this is actually a case of metamorphosis, but nevertheless within an anthropomorphic frame). Even in this latter version, however, the divine presence of the god or goddess reveals itself through his or her extraordinary beauty, stature and majesty, and this radiance also affects his or her clothing (that’s why Aphrodite does not succeed in concealing her true nature when she appears to Anchises as a maiden of normal μέγεθος καὶ εἶδος, *Hymn. Aphr.* 82). When a god reveals his presence, he risks dazzling the privileged individual, who is often terrified by the close encounter. This even occurs when the god manifests himself as he leaves: thus Telemachus is dumbfounded when he realizes that he has been in the presence of a goddess (ὁ δὲ φρεσὶν ἦσι νοήσας θάμβησεν κατὰ θυμόν: οἴσατο γὰρ θεὸν εἶναι *Od.* I.322–3), after Athena abandons

⁹ Divine epiphany in the ancient world has been the object of many studies, starting with the rich entry by Pfister (1924), and developing increasing attention to the problem of the divine presence in religious images: see also Mussies (1988), Gladigow (1990), Burkert (1997), and Pietre (2001). Harris (2009), pp. 23–90, provides a lucid analysis of epiphany dreams, considered as a characteristic form of dream experience in antiquity.

¹⁰ “... an authority figure visited the sleeper and made a significant pronouncement, and that was a dream” (Harris 2009, p. 23).

her disguise as Mentès, his human host, and flies away in the form of a bird – the story of Semele alone shows that the full manifestation of a divinity was considered unbearable for a human being. Conversely, at the other extreme where perceptibility fails altogether, the presence of a god is manifested through an omen.

In conclusion, we can assert that interaction between man and god takes place at a mental and visionary level, rather than a visual one.¹¹ However, if we accept that the divine *epiphaneiai* recorded over the ancient literature from Homer to Saint Paul reflect to some extent an actual religious experience, we should then pose the question: ‘what did ancient man see when he saw a god?’. The historian of religion who formulated this question answered as follows:

Sometimes he saw a god, sometimes a human shape, sometimes a phantom, sometimes an animal form, sometimes he had an hallucination of light or a vision of bliss and sometimes he did not see anything at all but was none the less aware of the divine presence which is too overwhelming to be described.¹²

In other words, the gods in Homer and subsequent literature manifest themselves with varying degrees of visibility but never total visibility – the scenes of their apparitions are generally characterized by considerable vagueness, and we can conclude that the concept of *epiphaneia* itself was extremely ambiguous.

It is worth remembering here that, according to an opinion now well established amongst scholars,¹³ Greek philosophers could always get away with a wide range of criticisms of the traditional religion because this was based on the efficacy of ritual rather than on the revelation of dogmatic truths, and did not require a separate priestly caste with the role of defending the truth of a sacred text. For this reason, expressions of pure rationalism could co-exist with the observance of traditional forms of worship, as we have seen in the case of Xenophanes and could also be true of Heraclitus, according to a recent interpretation.¹⁴ Homer’s

¹¹ See Dietrich (1997), p. 8.

¹² See Versnell (1987), p. 53. For the *fluidity* of the perception of the divine as presented in the texts and images of Greek civilization, see also Dietrich (1985-86). This notion avoids having to choose between two sharply divergent options: the interpretation entirely favourable to the reality of the described visions (as for example in Pfister (1924), s. v., col. 316), and the interpretation that insists upon their literary nature, not corresponding to a psychological experience (Bravo 2007). Similarly, Harris (2009) concludes, through careful examination of the descriptions of epiphany dreams, that while these reflect a datum of dream experience in antiquity, the incidence of literary convention must be assessed from case to case.

¹³ See Betegh (2006).

¹⁴ See Osborne (1997), Adoménas (1999), and Most (2007), p. 275. *Contra*, Scheer (2000), p. 67. I have to admit that I find it more difficult to make this case for Heraclitus, who fulminates against ritual in a disparaging manner not easy to underrate.

and Hesiod's texts were primarily a collective frame of reference and, for more cultured minds, could act as a matrix in which more or less personal and innovative viewpoints could be developed. My above remarks on the divine apparitions in Homer back up this assessment, and they show us just how flexible that matrix was and how wide the range of possible alternatives.

In actual fact, anyone who reflected upon the shape of the divine silhouettes could define them more precisely in whatever manner he preferred, given that even in Homer they were anything but clear. Pindar provides us with the example of another possible option in the first strophe of *Nemean VI*. In the famous beginning of this ode, which is probably to be dated to before 465, we read that the γένος of men and the gods is *unique* (if we accept the “conjunctive” reading of the initial words Ἐν ἀνδρῶν, ἔν θεῶν γένος), since both are born and draw their breath from the same mother (the Earth, clearly – cf. Hes. *Theog.* 106ff). Therefore human beings, who are separated from the immortals by a distinctly inferior δύναμις and an ephemeral existence, resemble the immortals in a way (τι), because of their power of thought (μέγαν νόον) and by nature (φύσιν). The case of Pindar shows, amongst other things, that reflecting on the unity of the divine was not incompatible with accepting the anthropomorphic model. However, it also shows how one could be vague about it.¹⁵

The feeling that we are dealing with a fluid perception of the divine is reinforced when we move from the literary sources to the iconography and in particular to the cult images, which allows us to touch the very core of Greek religion, linked as it was to the ritual of sacrifice, libation and prayer.¹⁶ Indeed, all these acts were addressed to a god or goddess “embodied” in a statue, assuming that it would enjoy the aroma of sacrifice, observe the liquids (especially wine) poured on the earth in its honour (but as Burkert asks, *cui bono?*),¹⁷ and listen to the prayers – this assumption must have been even more strong in the rituals of dressing and crowning. However, the literal interpretation of the god's presence in the statue clearly has paradoxical outcomes. As Heraclitus remarks in a famous fragment, it would be madness to address a speech to a statue without knowing what the gods are; it would be like talking “to the silent walls” of a house without knowing who lives inside and whether they are in at that particular moment.

¹⁵ For an interpretation of this ode, see Jurenka (1985), who perceives the first few lines as a polemical reference to Xenophanes, which is possible but cannot be proved; Gerber (1999); Boeke (2007), pp. 38–42.

¹⁶ On anthropomorphism, sacred images, and ritual, see Burkert (1991); Pirenne-Delforge (2010).

¹⁷ Burkert (1991), p. 88.

[...] καὶ τοῖς ἀγάλμασι δὲ τουτέοισιν εὐχονται, ὅκοιον εἴ τις δόμοισι λεσχηνεύοιτο, οὐ τι γινώσκων θεοῦς οὐδ' ἥρωας οἴτινές εἰσι.

[...] they pray to these statues, as if one were to carry on a conversation with houses, not recognizing the true nature of gods or demigods (Heraclitus B5).

Laura Gemelli has provided a useful observation on the deictic function of τουτέοισιν in this fragment. Heraclitus says ‘these statues here’, and this suggests that he uttered these words in the temple of Artemis in Ephesus and was referring specifically to the statues within it.¹⁸ In any case, Heraclitus is polemicizing against the custom of praying aloud, on the naive assumption that the worshipper’s invocations would reach the *ear* of the god. This was the same as equating – absurdly – the statue with a god endowed with sense organs.

It would come as no surprise that Xenophanes challenged the idea of a purely human and sentient interaction between the believer and the god-statue. In fact, this is probably the target (or one of the targets) of those lines in which he refutes the idea that a god can make use of the ordinary instruments of perception and action. When Xenophanes asserts the perfect immobility of a god, we can tentatively suggest that he is not only rejecting the Homeric representation of the gods going backwards and forwards between the heavens and the earth, but also, more radically, the assumption that a god or goddess would move in the holy days from one *temple* to another and from one end of Greece to the other in order to enjoy the celebrations offered up to them.¹⁹

οὐλος ὄραϊ, οὐλος δὲ νοεῖ, οὐλος δὲ τ' ἀκούει.

All of him sees, all thinks, and all hears. (B24)

¹⁸ See Gemelli Marciano (2009), pp. 101–102. An interesting interpretation of these lines has been put forward by Adoménas (1999), particularly pp. 101–107; see also Scheer (2000), pp. 66–67, 121. This fragment of Heraclitus’ is relevant as an early occurrence of ἀγάλμα as designating a statue of a god. Throughout the sixth and fifth centuries, the use of this term alternated between the (Homeric) meaning of ‘precious gift’ (often destined for the gods) and ‘statue’ of either men or gods, whereas its meaning of *Kultbild* starts to assert itself with Herodotus. For these developments, see Scheer (2000), pp. 8ff. However, the sense provided by the etymological connection with the verb ἀγάλλομαι (see Chantraine 1968, s. ν.), that *agalмата* are objects which both the giver and receiver ‘delight in’, gets never lost.

¹⁹ As Steiner (2001), p. 106 put it, religious processions were “designed to allow the deity to visit the various chief sites and reclaim them as his own”. One might even say that processions were a sort of ritual equivalent of the Olympian travels described in the Homeric poems (on which see below in the text): cf. Steiner (2001), pp. 156–160.

ἀλλ' ἀπάνευθε πόνοιο νόου φρενὶ πάντα κραδαίνει.

but without toil he shakes all things by the thought of his mind. (B25)

αἰεὶ δ' ἐν ταύτῳ μίμνει κινούμενος οὐδέν
οὐδὲ μετέρχεσθαί μιν ἐπιπρέπει ἄλλοτε ἄλλῃ.

Always he remains in the same place, moving not at all; nor is it fitting for him to go to different places at different times. (B26)

My theory that Xenophanes was also susceptible to the problem of cult images is confirmed by those texts in which, to criticise the relativistic assumptions of Greek anthropomorphism, he speculates on the criteria that would be adopted by other peoples that don't share the Greeks' physical characteristics, or even by animals, were they to depict the gods.

ἀλλ' εἰ χεῖρας ἔχον βόες <ἵπποι τ' > ἢ ἐλέοντες
ἢ γράφαι χεῖρεσσι καὶ ἔργα τελεῖν ἄπερ ἄνδρες,
ἵπποι μὲν θ' ἵπποισι βόες δέ τε βουσίην ὁμοίας
καὶ <κε> θεῶν ἰδέας ἔγραφον καὶ σώματ' ἐποίουν
τοιαῦθ' οἷον περ καὶ αὐτοὶ δέμας εἶχον <ἔκαστοι>.

But if cattle and horses or lions had hands, or were able to draw with their hands and do the works that men can do, horses would draw the forms of the gods like horses, and cattle like cattle, and they would make their bodies such as they each had themselves. (B15)

Αἰθιοπῆς τε <θεοὺς σφετέρους> σιμοὺς μέλανάς τε
Θρηκῆς τε γλαυκούς καὶ πυρρούς <φασὶ πέλεσθαι>.

The Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black, the Thracians that theirs have light blue eyes and a ruddy complexion. (B16)²⁰

The efficacy of the argumentation *per absurdum* on the virtual representation of the gods in the animal world in B15 has always been acknowledged, and there is little need to comment further on it here. We can however add something on B16. The text quoted above was reconstructed by Diels in a form that has become standard in editions of Xenophanes' work,²¹ but the segment of the quote that can be considered authentic is more limited. I have marked it in bold in the context of the quote by Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* VII.4.22), which appears below in full.

²⁰ For the meaning of πυρρούς, which I prefer to refer to the skin colour rather than the hair of the Thracians, see Sassi (1982).

²¹ An exception is Gemelli Marciano (2007b), p. 250.

Ἕλληνας δὲ ὡσπερ ἀνθρωπομόρφους οὕτως καὶ ἀνθρωποπαθεῖς τοὺς θεοὺς ὑποτίθενται, καὶ καθάπερ τὰς μορφὰς αὐτῶν ὁμοίας ἑαυτοῖς ἕκαστοι διαζωγραφοῦσιν, ὡς φησιν ὁ Ξενοφάνης, **Αἰθίοπές τε μέλανας σιμούς τε Θρᾶκές τε πυρροὺς καὶ γλαυκοὺς**, οὕτως καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς ὁμοίους ἑαυτοῖς αὐτοὺς ἀναπλάττουσιν [...]

Clearly the restored text suggested by Diels is based more on metric considerations than on the content. As far as the content is concerned, Clement's διαζωγραφοῦσιν seems to show that Xenophanes was referring not so much to things *spoken* by the Ethiopians and Thracians about their gods as to things *painted*, and therefore the ethnographic example, like the animal one, was concerned with iconographical representation. However, it is highly unlikely that Xenophanes had ever seen or was in some way acquainted with artworks of the distant peoples of Thrace and Ethiopia. Thus in B16, as in B15, he is speculating on a hypothetical situation, although he is obviously relying on a degree of probability that cannot be compared with an imagined artistic production by animals. His reflections here may rather concern the translation of misleading representations of literature into the figurative media of sculpture and painting (including that on vases), artefacts not necessarily destined for cult – the Gigantomachy painted on Athena's sacred peplos is an illustrious example of this practice, attacked by Socrates in Plat. *Euthyphro* 6B–C.²² Remember that in the *Iliad* Zeus loves travelling to the Ethiopians, followed by the other gods, and remaining there for several days while banqueting (*Il.* I.423ff). Even Iris hurries off to the Ethiopian lands, where generous offerings await the immortals, who clearly return this honour by stopping to eat with the others at the feast table (XXIII.205ff). Poseidon, averse as he is to Odysseus, prefers to go amongst the Ethiopians to enjoy a hecatomb rather than join the other gods of Olympus in the hall of Zeus to discuss the hero's return (*Od.* I.21ff, see V.282ff). Thrace is also mentioned at least once as a preferred destination for a god: Ares goes there after having been freed from being chained to Aphrodite, probably because he loves its bellicose people (*Od.* VIII.361: Aphrodite, on the other hand, flees to Cyprus where she is most honoured). In other words, Homer attributes a special relationship with the Olympian gods to the Ethiopians and the Thracians, who live in lands of legendary remoteness, and these gods return the veneration offered to them by appearing amongst them very much at their ease and joining them at the banquet table. Nor should we forget that the gods grant the pious Phaeacians a favour they would be unlikely to concede to the Achaeans and the Trojans: they φαίνονται ἐναργεῖς, and banquet in their midst (*Od.* VII.201ff). But in Xenophanes' world, in which the geographi-

²² See also, e. g., the case studied by Fink (1952).

cal and ethnographical horizons were much wider, Ethiopians and Thracians had become peoples who could be observed and placed within discernible areas of the *oikoumene*, and thus it was no longer possible to project mythical images of their everyday communal living with the gods. Still less, in his awareness of the plurality and diversity of cultures, could Xenophanes think that these peoples had the same gods as the Greeks did.

However, the voice of Xenophanes must not have been a *vox clamantis in deserto* within his own society at the time – and the same goes probably for Heraclitus. The worship of images presumably engendered a wide variety of attitudes determined by socio-cultural background and the individual believer's degree of anxiety, as well as the context of the act of worship – this remark could apply also to the Catholic cult of images, even as practiced today. In other words, there must have always been a wide spectrum of views on the relationship with a divine image, from the extremes of believing in the absolute and permanent identity of the statue with the god, to the more or less disenchanting awareness of the symbolic value of the act of worship. A recent book on the role of the *Kultbilder* in ancient Greece came to the conclusion that, according to the most widely held conviction, the presence of a god in a religious image was a mere *possibility*, and this was determined from time to time in the worshipper's gaze.²³ This view is a balanced one and quite acceptable, all the more so because it is quite consistent with the very “fluidity” of ancient (and not just ancient) religious experience which we have already mentioned in dealing with the divine epiphany.

A few years ago, Laura Gemelli based on extensive documentation the interesting theory that the two fundamental elements in Xenophanes' “theological” discourse (monotheism and anti-anthropomorphism) were inspired by worship of the supreme god Ahuramazda – a characteristically aniconic cult.²⁴ In my opinion, there is not much need to look elsewhere for henotheistic ideas, which Xenophanes could find in the tradition of Greek epic poetry, as we have seen. It cannot be ruled out that he came across elements of the Persian religion that were relevant to him, particularly the absence of religious images (which was

²³ See Scheer (2000), pp. 303–4. A similar assessment can be found in the historical-artistic study by Elsner (2000), particularly pp. 52–53 and 59–60, and, most recently, in the editor's Introduction to a valuable volume exploring various issues relating to divine images in ancient Greece and Rome (Mylonopoulos, ed., 2010).

²⁴ Gemelli Marciano (2005) (for a similar line, see Lanza 2005, pp. 114–17). Gemelli Marciano (2005, pp. 130–31 and 2007b, pp. 348–49) holds that contacts with the Persian religion were also responsible for Heraclitus' aversion to the custom of praying to the *agalmata*, as argued in B5. See Palmer (1998), esp. pp. 26–29, for a balanced judgment on the sources of Xenophanes' “ouranian god”.

remarked upon later by Herodotus I.131) – the aniconism of the ancient Persian religious tradition, inherited from its Indo-Iranic origins, was maintained consistently until Artaxerxes II's introduction of the statue for the cult of the fertility goddess Anahita (Artaxerxes reigned from 404 to 359 BCE). However, we should bear in mind that the aversion to images was restricted to worship and did not prevent an anthropomorphic concept of god from developing in other contexts, as it is documented by some literary descriptions in the Avesta (think of the Bible for Judaism), and by various representations of Ahuramazda in the art of the Achaemenid period (even the Zoroastrians' subsequent iconoclastic movement would not target these representations, because they were not worshiped or prayed to).²⁵ If anything, we might infer that Xenophanes chose to embrace particular elements of the Persian religious tradition rather than the many ancient oriental traditions which could have been known to him and were hostile to the worship of images (for instance the Assyrians and the Babylonians), and that he identified within that not unambiguous tradition the part that was most decisively antagonistic to the anthropomorphization of the divine. At all events, any integration of elements from the Persian world must not have been at all passive, but rather oriented by highly focused understanding. In other words, the decisive input for the questions Xenophanes is posing comes from within the Greek religious tradition and the range of critical possibilities that *this* offers him.

All in all, with all due respect to Xenophanes' impact on Greek "theology", I think that the specific positions he adopts on the unity and nature of the gods are not particularly new. The most interesting point in his agenda is, instead, the link he establishes between these positions and a new discourse on the possibilities and limitations of knowledge. In the second part of my paper I would like, as promised, to concentrate on this point.

2

The obvious starting point is here B34, in which Xenophanes denies the possibility of obtaining a certainty about things that elude the direct grasp of the senses. It is remarkable that the gods are mentioned here in conjunction with «all the things» an author wishes to speak of (almost a hendiadys): for human beings, both the gods and the principles underlying the sensible world belong to an order of reality that *cannot be seen*.

²⁵ See Boyce (1975); de Jong (1997), particularly pp. 92–97, 350–52.

καὶ τὸ μὲν οὖν σαφὲς οὔτις ἀνὴρ ἴδεν οὐδέ τις ἔσται
 εἰδὼς ἀμφὶ θεῶν τε καὶ ἄσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων·
 εἰ γὰρ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα τύχοι τετελεσμένον εἰπὼν,
 αὐτὸς ὅμως οὐκ οἶδε· δόκος δ' ἐπὶ πᾶσι τέτυκται.

No man knows, or ever will know, the truth about the gods and what I say about all things; for even if one succeeded in saying the complete truth, yet he himself would not know. In fact, opinion is given about all things [or ... for all men].²⁶ (B34)

Central to this fragment is the problem of the adequacy of knowledge, whose clarity and certainty (both connoted by the term *σαφές*) depend on the degree of evidence of its objects. It is therefore impossible to obtain sure knowledge both of the gods and *all things*, which are at best objects of an *opinion* (*δόκος*, l. 4). B35 makes clear (through the imperative *δεδοξάσθω*) that an opinion is not only possible but necessary in relation to these realities, since – I suggest – they are not *visible*.

ταῦτα δεδοξάσθω μὲν ἑοικότα τοῖς ἐτύμοισι ...

Let these things be opined as resembling the truth ... (B35)

The apposition *ἑοικότα* characterizes the level of opinion as *resembling* the subject under examination and therefore *plausible* (thanks to the etymological connection with the root *εἶκ-* which is the same as for *εἰκῶν*, “similar image”), but also as *appropriate* and *consistent* with respect to the overall frame of reference. In this connection, it must be noted that the configuration of Xenophanes’ god is wholly consistent with this cognitive programme inspired by criteria of verisimilitude together with appropriateness – which is understood in this case in relation to principles of morality and rationality of the idea of god. B26, for example, asserts that it is not appropriate (*οὐδὲ [...] ἐπιπρέπει*) for god to be going here and there, and Werner Jaeger did not exaggerate in seeing here the first manifestation of the theological category of “that which is befitting a god” (*θεοπρεπές*), which would become very important in subsequent Greek thought.²⁷

One may guess that B34 acted as an introduction to a poem in which Xenophanes went on to expound his knowledge. In any case it works like a proo-

²⁶ My translation here diverges at the utmost, for interpretative reasons, from that of Kirk-Raven-Schofield (1983). On B34, I still substantially share the empiristic interpretation of Fränkel (1925), which was corroborated by a series of linguistic observations of unsurpassed sophistication. On B35, I take into account Rivier (1956) for similar reasons.

²⁷ Jaeger (1947), pp. 50–51.

emium in stating the procedures for obtaining that knowledge, and the absence of any reference to some divine source of inspiration was certainly an intentional signal of Xenophanes' break with the tradition of epic poetry. He did not believe in the Muses as guarantors of the truth as much as he did not believe that the gods could reveal themselves to others as described by Homer and Hesiod. Indeed, he did not believe that they could reveal themselves at all (the rejection of divination attributed to him by Cicero, A52, is consistent with this position).

On this point Xenophanes agrees with Empedocles, for whom the essence of the divine cannot be attained directly through the channels of perception (sight and touch):

οὐκ ἔστιν πελάσασθαι ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἐφικτόν
 ἡμετέροις ἢ χερσὶ λαβεῖν, ἤτις τε μεγίστη
 πειθοῦς ἀνθρώποισιν ἀμαξιτὸς εἰς φρένα πίπτει.

It is impossible to bring [the god] near to us within reach of our eyes or to grasp him with the hands – although this is the main road of persuasion entering the minds of men. (Empedocles B133)

As with Xenophanes, this theme is associated in Empedocles with the idea that the physical shape and the cognitive functions of god cannot in any way be understood by comparison with any known organism.

οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀνδρομέη κεφαλῆι κατὰ γυῖα κέκασται,
 οὐ μὲν ἀπαὶ νώτοιο δύο κλάδοι αἴσσουνται,
 οὐ πόδες, οὐ θοὰ γούνα, οὐ μήδεα λαχνήεντα,
 ἀλλὰ φρήν ἱερὴ καὶ ἀθέσφατος ἔπλετο μούνον,
 φροντίσι κόσμον ἅπαντα καταΐσσουσα θεοῖσιν.

For he is not furnished with a human head upon limbs, nor do two branches spring from his back, he has no feet, no nimble knees, no shaggy genitals, but he is mind alone, holy and beyond description, darting through the whole cosmos with swift thoughts (Empedocles B134).

What is peculiar about Xenophanes is, however, the link he makes between the problem of human knowledge and his critique of the epic representation of the divine and human world – a peculiarity clearly due to his profession of rhapsode. On the basis of several linguistic indicators, it can be shown that other texts normally attributed with an epistemological significance are imbued with an anti-Homeric polemic:

ὅπποσα δὴ θνητοῖσι πεφύηασιν εἰσοράσθαι [...]

All those things that have appeared to mortals so as to be visible [...] (B36)

ἦν τ' Ἴριν καλέουσι, νέφος καὶ τοῦτο πέφυκε,
πορφύρεον καὶ φοινίκεον καὶ χλωρὸν ἰδέσθαι.

What they call Iris, this too is cloud, purple and red and yellow to behold. (B32)

In B36 we find πεφύνασιν, an inflection of the verb φαίνομαι which refers directly to the world of divine. But the verb εἰσοράασθαι is also loaded with Homeric resonance: it is often found in the poems (and occasionally in the same position at the end of the line) in contexts in which the apparition of a god or of men who are in some way intriguing evokes amazement in the observer (*Il.* XII.312, *Od.* III.246, IV.142, VII.71, X.396).²⁸ The fragment might, therefore, allude precisely to the restricted horizon of human experience, in which for Xenophanes – unlike Homer – the gods and the natural causes of phenomena do not reveal themselves. The verb ἰδέσθαι in B32 (l. 2) takes up and polemically plays with a Homeric linguistic module (θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι, which always recurs in the final position in Homer, *Il.* V.725, X.439, XVIII.83, 377; *Od.* VI.306, VII.45, VIII.366, XIII.108),²⁹ placing the accent on the fact that when a rainbow appears, what *are seen* are colours in the sky, which indicates the presence of a cloud and not the person of a god. The line is therefore a polemic against the mythological explanation of a physical phenomenon like a rainbow, but at the same time suggests a rethinking of the status of gods as something separate from nature. We could say that alongside the “demythologization” of nature, there is not simply a “de-anthropomorphization” but also a “denaturalization” of the divine.³⁰ It is difficult to say whether Xenophanes’ work was more important for the subsequent research on nature or for theology. In his intentions, however, there was no distinction between these two directions, just as his reflections on the ways of gathering knowledge were not distinct from his critique of traditional beliefs.

Two texts amongst the most significant reflections on epistemology in the pre-Socratic period, Alcmaeon’s B1 and Chapter 1 of *On Ancient Medicine*, show important parallels with B34 with respect to their terminology and the way they pose the problem. Both these texts contrast the ideal of cognitive clarity that can only be provided by direct experience (like Xenophanes, the author of *Ancient Medicine* uses the link εἰδέναι τὸ σαφέες) with the need for procedures that draw on information provided by the senses to arrive at reliable if not certain conclusions (Xenophanes’ δόκος corresponds to Alcmaeon’s τεκμαίρεσθαι) on reali-

²⁸ Gemelli Marciano (2007b), p. 276 plays on these parallels to deprive the fragment of epistemological meaning. From my point of view, they rather reinforce it.

²⁹ This has been noted by Leshner (1992), p. 143.

³⁰ For an effective examination of this point, see Drozdek (2007), pp. 16–7.

ties that «do not appear» to the senses (both Alcmaeon and the author of *On Ancient Medicine* define this area of speculation as τὰ ἀφανέα). These parallels have often been noted, and Xenophanes' contribution in initiating an important debate, destined to develop throughout the fifth century (we should also mention Anaxagoras' ὄψις ἀδήλων τὰ φαινόμενα) has also been acknowledged. There has, however, been less recognition of the fact that Xenophanes was the first to link the question of the gods' nature to that of the method of knowledge in terms that were repeated exactly on many occasions.

Let us now consider the passage (*Hist.* II.53) in which Herodotus observes that until not so distant times *it was not known* (οὐκ ἠπιστάετο) what was the origin of each of the gods, whether they had always existed and what they could possibly look like (ὁκοῖοι τε τινές τὰ εἶδεα) – not until Homer and Hesiod composed a theogony and gave the gods names, honorable attributes and prerogatives, and described their features (εἶδεα αὐτῶν σημήναντες). Given the clear similarities with the first sentence of Protagoras' B4, Walter Burkert some time ago put forward the theory that we are dealing here with a “Protagoras-Zitat”, and this has now become common currency amongst scholars of Herodotus.³¹

περὶ μὲν θεῶν οὐκ ἔχω εἰδέναί, οὔθ' ὡς εἰσὶν οὔθ' ὡς οὐκ εἰσὶν οὔθ' ὅποιοί τινες ἰδέαν· πολλὰ γάρ τὰ κωλύοντα εἰδέναί ἢ τ' ἀδηλότης καὶ βραχύς ὢν ὁ βίος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.³²

About gods, I am unable to know whether they exist and what they might look like, and there are many things that act as an impediment: on the one hand, there is the lack of evidence, and on the other, there is the brevity of a man's life. (Protagoras B4)

In fact, the chronology does not exclude the possibility of the influence going in the opposite direction, from Herodotus to Protagoras.³³ It is worth remembering that Herodotus developed his position on religion almost entirely on his own and with strict reference to his ethnographic observations. The notion that Greek religion is a cultural *construct* just like any other (and its principal authors were Homer and Hesiod) is undoubtedly correlated to the relativistic standpoint that animates his entire historical work. Nevertheless, Herodotus upholds the substance of worship in the Greek religion, and regards the temples and statues of

³¹ Burkert (1985), p. 131 was followed, amongst others, by Thomas (2006), p. 67, and Scullion (2006), p. 202.

³² Worthy of note the reflections of Di Benedetto (2001), who suggests restoring μή after κωλύοντα on the basis of the passage of Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* XIV.19, 10, which is ignored in the edition of the *Vorsokratiker*. The correction is accepted by Bonazzi (2009), p. 462 n. 33.

³³ As argued in Di Benedetto (2001), p. 246, after having asserted that “il punto di partenza è costituito dal fr. 34 di Senofane”.

the gods as signs of identity of Greek culture, on a par with the community of blood and language (VIII.144).³⁴ So the acknowledgement of the role of Homer and Hesiod in the “canonization” of Greek religion might well have been just grist to the historian’s mill, were it not for the fact that Herodotus specifically says that before Homer and Hesiod the Greeks *did not know* (ἠπιστέατο) who the gods were and what they were like. This expression might indicate that he is drawing on Xenophanes for the terms of the issue, even though he seems to look with a more favourable eye to the role of the epic poets as mediators of knowledge.

I believe that Protagoras’ assertion can also be placed along this same line of thought that closely links the question of the gods’ nature (including their appearance) with that of knowledge and its limitations.³⁵ The sophist’s B4 shows many parallels with Xenophanes’ B34, from the emphasis on the impossibility of certain knowledge of the gods (characterized as such by the verb εἰδέναι) to the identification of the non-perceptibility (ἀδηλότης) of the object as a fundamental epistemological obstacle.³⁶ According to this interpretation, Protagoras’ reference to the brevity of life is an addition helping to reassert the improbability of encountering a god during the course of a personal experience. Protagoras goes indeed so far as to touch on the issue of the existence of the gods. However, the conclusion to his reflections is not atheism, but agnosticism, which does not exclude him upholding the religious *nomos* – similarly to Xenophanes – which he considers to be one of the necessary forms of social cohesion.³⁷

Xenophanes’ legacy was pervasive in the Athens of the second half of the fifth century, and we may wonder whether the extraordinary popularity of his ideas was due to enduring success in the symposia. One can track echoes of B34 in many passages of Euripides, who retraces man’s difficulty in understanding (εὐρεῖν) divine matters (which fall under the dominion of the ἀφανής, as do heavenly phenomena) to the inscrutability of divine plans, which are revealed to mortals through their contradictory and disturbing effects (*Hel.* 711–721, 1137–1150; *HF* 62; *Iph. Taur.* 476–478; fr. 795).³⁸ An echo of Xenophanes’ vision of the divine has been also detected in Socrates’ invitation (at the end of his conversa-

³⁴ See Gould (1994) for a convincing assessment of Herodotus’ position on religion.

³⁵ One should not forget that a similar connection is attributed to Melissus in Diog. Laert. IX.24 (30A1.1 DK).

³⁶ On this point alone, I disagree with Mansfeld (1981), which otherwise I have found an inspiring work. For Mansfeld, the motif of the *adēlotēs* marks Protagoras’ break with Xenophanes, whose viewpoint is supposed to be more logical than personal, whereas, in the framework I have suggested, the question of personal experience of the divine is already present in Xenophanes.

³⁷ For this view, mostly shared and recently revisited by Bolonyai (2007), see Müller (1967).

³⁸ See Egli (2003), pp. 131–35; Hose (2009), pp. 10–11.

tion with Aristodemus recorded by Xenophon), to acknowledge the greatness of god, who can see and hear everything at the same time, is present everywhere and takes care of all things in the same moment (Xen. *Mem.* I.4.18).³⁹ In truth, the qualities of all-seeing-ness and omniscience were already characteristics of Hesiod's Zeus (*Op.* 267–69)⁴⁰ and, in my opinion, we are authorized to track an influence of Xenophanes only where such prerogatives are specifically related to the different mental make-up of the god. If this occurs at all, it is in a famous document of the Sophistic criticism of the religious phenomenon, namely, the Sisyphus' speech in the satirical play with the same title that part of the tradition attributes to Critias, and is included in the *Vorsokratiker* under this heading (88B25: but there are very good reasons to attribute it to Euripides, who staged a *Sisyphus* in 415 BCE, and could have had one of his characters uttering some motifs from Sophistic culture without necessarily sharing such views himself).⁴¹ According to this text, fear of the gods was an ancient invention (essential for civilisation) by a *sophos*, who intended in this way to prevent criminal acts that can be carried out secretly from escaping the full rigour of the law (this motif is also present in Xenophon's comment at the end of Socrates' speech in *Mem.* I.4.19). The construction attributed to this wise man is fairly sophisticated and recalls Xenophanes' "purified" concept of god on various points, the first of which, in the series that follows, is the most decisive in my outline: it is the prerogative of the δαίμων and of his θεία φύσις listening and looking νόωι (l. 18); nothing escapes the gods (τοὺς θεούς, l. 23 – note how singular and plural alternate in the description of divine power) who can see and hear "everything" that the mortals do (l. 19); the δαίμων lives in the highest part of the heavens, an "appropriate" place (κάν πρέποντι χωρίωι, l. 39) to arouse fear in men through lightning and thunder.⁴²

Subsequently, the notion that god evades experience through the senses by his nature, and therefore cannot be represented iconographically, was taken up again by Antisthenes, who denied that god's features can be comprehended ἐξ εἰκόνοσ, because he does not manifest himself to the sight and does not resemble anything else (οὐδενὶ ἔοικέναι, fr. 40 Declava Caizzi).⁴³ Strangely

³⁹ Cf., for instance, Leshner (1992), p. 185 n. 12; McPherran (1996), p. 287; Sedley (2007), p. 83.

⁴⁰ See also *supra*, p. 285.

⁴¹ Cf. Kahn (1997). As far as I am aware, Xenophanes has been mentioned in this connection the first time in Palumbo (2005). Palumbo goes so far as to recognize Xenophanes in the *sophos* who is said to have invented religion.

⁴² For the parallels that are detectable on this last point with the theories of Democritus and Prodicus on the origins of religion, see Kahn (1997), pp. 259–62.

⁴³ Antisthenes' thought on the gods as a whole has been studied by Brancacci (1985–86).

enough, Democritus seems to be the sole exception amongst the rich spectrum of “sceptical” variations that follow on each other around the end of fifth century and the beginning of the fourth. In fact, he seems to have established an interesting link between a variety of phenomena such as the evil eye, the divinatory interpretation of dreams and the divine epiphanies, by providing a unitary explanation derived from his theory of perception. The casting of spells, the oneiric images and the apparitions of gods are all related to atomic εἶδωλα that detach themselves from bodies and transmit both the physical aspect and the psychic state of the person who emits them (A74, A77–79, A118, A137, A138). Unfortunately our sources leave unanswered further questions on the nature of the *eidola* and above all – what interests us here most – on the divine nature of some of them.⁴⁴ But one point is sufficiently clear for the purposes of our argument. Democritus traces the belief in gods back to an interpretation that “the ancients” had given of the appearing (φαντασία) of *eidōla* that approach men, sometimes talking to them, with good or evil intent (one would therefore hope to meet only benevolent *eidōla*!) and are characterized by extraordinary beauty and greater stature than the human one (B166; on beauty, *Lucretius* V.1169–1178, not in DK; on their emitting voice, B142). Superhuman stature and beauty are the main characteristics of divine visions in the narrative of epic poetry: their presence here might indicate that Democritus perceived in those tales the reflex of an actual psychological experience that needed to be rationalized but substantially accepted.⁴⁵

Lastly we shall see how Plato confronted the question of whether god can be known, in the *Timaeus*. We come across an interesting aside at the beginning of *Timaeus*’ cosmological exposé, where he argues that the visible world must necessarily have a “cause”, given that it is subject to birth.

τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντὸς εὐρεῖν τε ἔργον καὶ εὐρόντα εἰς πάντας ἀδύνατον λέγειν· τόδε δ’ οὖν ἄλλιν ἐπισκεπτόν περὶ αὐτοῦ, πρὸς πότερον τῶν παραδειγμάτων ὁ τεκταινόμενος αὐτὸν ἀπηργάζετο, πότερον πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ταῦτα καὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχον ἢ πρὸς τὸ γεγονός.

⁴⁴ I refer on this point to the lucid analysis of Warren (2007); see also Gemelli Marciano (2007a), pp. 290–92.

⁴⁵ For the origin of religious beliefs according to Democritus, see Henrichs (1975) and all the texts (a number of them not included in DK) collected in Leszl (2009), pp. 319–324, 355–357 (enclosed in this edition is a CD containing a helpful introduction). Epicurus accepts the existence of the gods by arguing that we have an ἐναργής knowledge of them: for an explanation of how this argument should be understood, see Mansfeld (1993); Obbink (1996), pp. 1–11. For Epicurus’ criticism of Democritus’ theory of oneiric images, as recorded by *Diogenes Laërtius* fr. 10 Smith, see Clay (1980).

To discover the maker and father of this universe is indeed a hard task, and having found him, it would be impossible to tell everyone about him. Let us return therefore to our question, and ask to which pattern did its constructor work, that which remains the same and is unchanging or that which has come to be? (*Tim.* 28c–29a)

A long tradition of *interpretatio christiana* has read this passage as a celebration of the absolute ineffability of God, who transcends all knowledge and description,⁴⁶ but our reading must obviously keep within the paradigm of Platonic philosophy. Plato is stressing not the impossibility of understanding the nature of the divine being who has created the cosmos, but rather the difficulties in doing so, and this assertion aligns itself with a long series of calls to adopt an attitude of “epistemological prudence” in relation to the divine, as we have seen developing in the wake of Xenophanes throughout the fifth century. Also in other works besides the *Timaeus*, Plato deals with this theme in perfect continuity with the tradition of critical rationalism that preceded him. He shares *in primis* with this tradition the tendency to treat the divergence between the human and the divine as an element of a wider epistemological problem, marked by opposition between the sensible world and a range of things (in his case, the Forms) that cannot be seen but have a founding role in relation to everything else.⁴⁷

Even Socrates’ joke in the *Cratylus* (400d) is along the spectrum of caution that joins Xenophanes to Herodotus and Protagoras: “we know nothing of the gods (directly: ἴμεν), what their names are, who they are and what they call each other.” According to Socrates, the fact that the true names of the gods are known only to them does not prohibit the investigation of the denominations, not entirely lacking in correctness, that men have given them as a tribute to the conventions of worship. Plato reveals here his willingness to accept the traditional views about the gods, and this is confirmed by other passages in which, while criticizing the contents of the ancient theogonies, he calls respect for the traditions of Greek religion (*Resp.* 427B1–C6; *Tim.* 40D–41A; *Leg.* 738B–D, 886c; see *Epinomis* 988c).⁴⁸ In the *Timaeus*, however, the strategy for overcoming the epistemological impasse is more complex. In fact, central to Plato’s agenda here is a discourse on the world of *phusis* that does not aim as such at the epistemic certainty that must characterize intelligible reality, but wishes at least to be *plausi-*

⁴⁶ See Nock (1962).

⁴⁷ For a general overview of Plato’s theology following the classic studies of Solmsen (1942) and Verdenius (1954), see Laurent (2003).

⁴⁸ Interestingly, at *Leg.* 738c2 Plato claims that the legislator has to maintain the temples and the rites that have been established following the instructions of oracles, ancient *logoi*, divine inspiration, or visions (*phasmata*).

ble. This argument, as we know, has to make use of a certain number of images to provide a credible representation of the cosmic creation: a divine demiurge who operates as a craftsman, a Soul that circles around the body of the world, and the magmatic substance of the *chōra*. But ultimately the best proof both of the existence of god and his *good* nature is exhibited by the order and beauty of the cosmos. In Plato's narrative, the demiurge himself stops at one stage to admire the world he has constructed as an "image (ἄγαλμα) of the eternal gods" (*Tim.* 37c). It is worth noting that Plato plays here on the semantic richness of ἄγαλμα, reviving the term's original link to the verb ἀγάλλομαι, which refers to something that one can "rejoice in", while presenting the cosmos as an "image" that reveals the perfection of the model on which its creation was based. We could say that the world is a statue that finally incorporates god and his intelligent design – much more than any statue sculpted by man.⁴⁹

David Sedley has argued that the teleological construction of the *Timaeus* presupposes a crucial move by Socrates, who was apparently the first to point in the ordered cosmos the effects of the *pronoia* of a beneficent god for the human species, and *therefore* the proof of the existence and the goodness of god. (This is the position comprehensively recorded by Xenophon in two famous chapters of his *Memorabilia*, I.4 and IV.3).⁵⁰ It is interesting that in the wake of this "teleological turn" so crucial for the history of science, the theme of *cognitio Dei ex operibus* took form and would have a long and important history in the development of rational theology.⁵¹ The idea of the knowledge of god through his works had not occurred to Xenophanes, but it could be seen as a rationalized version of an option that had already been glimpsed in the world of divine epiphanies: where the gods prefer revealing themselves in the miracles they work to making themselves directly visible.

⁴⁹ See above, n. 18, a few references to the semantic history of ἄγαλμα. In Neo-Platonic literature and specifically in the wake of this passage from *Timaeus*, the word specializes in defining the material world (or some things in it such as names) as «image» of the intelligible gods: see Hirschle (1979), particularly pp. 17ff.

⁵⁰ I referred to *Memorabilia* I.4 above, pp. 299f. Cf. Sedley (2007), particularly pp. 75–92, and Sedley (2008). Powers (2009) has recently argued that the main point in Xenophon's agenda is not the existence of the divine craftsman, but his being wise.

⁵¹ As acutely pointed out by Korteweg (1979), particularly pp. 62–3.

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