

Chapter 6

Xenophanes

1. Life

Xenophanes of Colophon was a poet. Indeed, he was quite a good poet, forced by circumstances to become a sort of professional bard. He certainly recited his own poems at banquets. He wrote poems *about* banquets, and about how the poetry for a sacrificial banquet ought to contain the rational praise of God, not the fantasies and fairy-tales of the old myths (2 1 B1).ⁱ In other words, like most of the Greek poets, he had a didactic purpose in composing his verses.ⁱⁱ But unlike most of them he was a theological rationalist, with scientific interests that were deep and serious.

Fortunately for us one of his surviving fragments directs his audience on how to open the conversation with an aged exile like himself after a banquet; and another fragment gives his answer to the second question that he proposes: “Now tell us, sir, who are you among men, and how many are your years?/ How old were you, when the Mede arrived?” “Already now seven and sixty years are gone/ Tossing my mind about through the land of Greece/ And from my birth till then there were twenty five more as well/ If I know how to speak about these things truly” (B 22, B 8).ⁱⁱⁱ

The “arrival of the Mede” at Colophon was in 546 BCE. This was a crucial turning point for Xenophanes, because he was clearly one of the political elite who was displaced by the new order.

Born in 571, he had to go into exile when he was twenty-five. For perhaps seventy years he wandered all over the Greek world, East and West. He was an almost exact contemporary of Pythagoras; and he writes of him as someone he has known. In his philosophical interests he remains more of an Easterner, an Ionian; but unlike Anaximenes (or the Milesian group generally, as far as we can tell) he has a powerful concern with the social significance of religion.

We do not hear of his wife, but he is reported to have outlived his sons (A 1). In his last years, he was at the court of Hiero, tyrant of Syracuse. Many later writers associated him with Elea in southern Italy, because they wanted to make him the “teacher” of Parmenides. It is certainly a mistake to think of Xenophanes as the founder of a “school” or a “succession.” But it is, of course, quite probable that a philosophical wanderer would spend a fairly long time in the company of hosts as sympathetically interested and hospitable as Parmenides and Zeno surely were (cf. A 13 — Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1400b). That Xenophanes influenced Parmenides through direct contact and lengthy discussion appears to be highly likely.

He was also in Sicily for years, and he met Empedokles. Perhaps they lived together for a time. Empedokles is reported, in fact, to have admired Xenophanes (A 5).^{iv} But there are no plausible signs of influence.

2. The Gods

Xenophanes produced some important reflections about the limits of human knowledge. But these should be seen, I think, in the context of his rational piety. It was part of the traditional piety to insist on the gulf between the immortal Gods and mortal humans. We have seen how Pythagoras (probably!) insisted that “only God is wise” — though his followers were so convinced of *his* wisdom that they put him into a special intermediate category by himself, *between* the gods and ordinary humanity. Xenophanes, who wanted to replace the traditional piety with a more rational religion, was deeply conscious of the need for humility in all human discourse about God. It was his

own criticism of what the traditional writers and believers had said about God, that sharpened his awareness of the limits of human knowledge, and of the general difficulty of deciding what is true and reliable in our experience.

Xenophanes' own personal piety certainly began with the sense of the "divine life" that he had derived from studying the new philosophy of nature in the books of Anaximander and Anaximenes. But we shall approach it by considering first his criticism of the traditional religion. His first objection is to the moral irresponsibility of the poets. "Everyone from the beginning has learned according to Homer . . ." (B10), he said. The line is preserved by Herodian, a grammarian who did not care what everyone had learned. But other fragments show us what Homer's most misleading teachings were. "Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods/ All sorts of things that are disgraceful and blameworthy among men:/ Theft, adultery and deceiving one another" (B11).^v

"It is good to hold the gods in high regard," says Xenophanes in the last line of fragment 1. At a banquet "goodhearted men must hymn the god/ With pious stories and pure speech" (B1: 11-4). This is the foundation stone of what we may call his "civil theology." As a natural scientist he believes firmly that the divine power in the world is all one; but in human communities there is no harm in speaking of "the gods" as a community. If we speak of the Gods in the plural, however (as Thales did) then we must picture them as a happy and peaceful community of beneficent powers. We must not sing of wars between Titans and Olympians, or Gods and Giants; and it is not right for the poets to treat scientific absurdities such as the Centaurs as divine beings. (Except for Cheiron, the Centaurs were always very badly behaved anyway.)

The civil theology of Xenophanes rests on a slightly puritanical view of the good life — or at least on a fear of luxury and excess. He thinks that his own small home community of Colophon was corrupted by the adoption of Lydian habits and values. This happened even before "the Medes came" and they lost their political independence (B3).^{vi} As we have already seen, Xenophanes was a cheerful man, who enjoyed good food and drink together with cultured conversation. But he

approved of the custom of pouring wine into water (rather than the other way round) because that usually ensured a greater dilution (B5).

It is not just Colophon, however, that has been corrupted by barbarian influences. The Greeks, quite generally, value and attach importance to the wrong sort of excellence. They all think that to win a victory in some athletic contest, and especially in the Olympic games, is the greatest achievement possible for an individual, and a great glory for his city. But actually, says Xenophanes, such a one is “Not as worthy as I. For better than the strength/ Of men and of horses is our wisdom” (B2: 11-2). Athletic prowess, or the endurance of pain in boxing, do not make the city richer. Clearly Xenophanes believed that his scientific interests (with his poetic skills) could make a community better and more prosperous; and the reason was that if the city heeded him it would have *eunomia* (good customs and good government).

His attitude toward the civil deification of humans who were worthy models of virtue and benefaction was slightly ambivalent. The stories are clear and consistent. Xenophanes advises firmly that we must not offer sacrifices to mere humans; and we must not mourn for those who are gods. The cult of Osiris is a religious error, because of the supposed death and actual mourning for a god. Deification of a human hero is rationally objectionable because it allows an immortal to “come into being.” Xenophanes does not condemn it outright, as long as there is no mourning for the human thus immortalized.^{vii} (We shall understand his permissive suspense of judgment better in due course.)

Those who are not philosophers, need Gods who are a projection of their ideal selves. The philosophers should only criticize the mythical divine models of ordinary citizens in a morally rational way. They must “hymn god reverently”; and the god of the hymn is the god of the moment. The singers do not know that he is *really* an aspect of the One God; but at least they can come to understand that he is in perfect harmony with all of his divine fellows. Eusebios reports that “concerning the gods, Xenophanes shows also that there is no hegemony among them; for it is not holy that any god should be under a despot” (A32).^{viii}

When we come to Xenophanes' attack on cultural relativism in theology, we are moving out of civil theology, and toward the theoretical scientific viewpoint. But we should not lose sight of the social relevance of his critique. "Ethiopians say their gods are snubnosed and black,/ Thracians that theirs have blue eyes and red hair" (B16). If men project their Gods as ideal physical images of themselves, they are thereby encouraged to compete physically, and to value physical prowess; and if they concentrate attention thus on their physical and cultural differences, they are led into hostility, battle and warfare, instead of peaceful commerce and cultural prosperity. Nowhere in what remains of Xenophanes do we find a word of praise for the aristocratic (Homeric) ideal of the warrior. His wisdom brings good government in the community, peace and good fellowship between communities. We ought not to be attending to our differences in a self-admiring way. It is the use of our common reason that is our proper concern.

3. God

The suggestion that "If oxen and horses or lions had hands,/ And could draw . . ./ Then horses would draw the shapes of gods like horses, and oxen like oxen" (B15), prepares the more thoughtful audience for a properly scientific theology. God is not like us humans, and the immortal divine life is not like our life in any *sensible* respect at all.

The first essential in making the transition, is to grasp the meaning of "immortality": "Mortals suppose that gods are born/ Wear human clothes, and have a voice and a human figure" (B14); but God does not "come into being" at all. He is alive and perfect everywhere, and at all times. "One is God, greatest among gods and men,/ In no way like mortals in body or in mind" (B23).^{ix} Aristotle reports that "Xenophanes used to say that those who say that the Gods are born are as impious as those who say that they die" (A12, *Rhetoric* 1399b5).^x This was an appropriate maxim for the civil theology that followed from the scientific theology; and for this reason the deification of human heroes was not rationally desirable.

The one true God *does have* a “figure” (*demas*) but it is not human; and he does have a “mind” (*noema* — meaning here “sensing and thinking activity”). But again it is quite different from ours. Xenophanes’s God is not the bodiless intellect that Clement of Alexandria (who quotes the fragment) wants him to be. As Aristotle puts it, he is “the whole heaven” (A30, *Metaphysics* 986b22-5); and he is a sphere (as the *kosmos* of Anaximenes was, near enough!).

The spherical shape of God’s body is not directly referred to in the fragments. But we find it in the testimonies in direct connection either with the account of the divine mind, or with God’s physical stillness; and there is an impressive chorus of unanimous witness about it.^{xi} Diogenes Laertios says “The being of God is spherical, having no resemblance to man [cf. B23]. Whole it sees, and whole it hears [cf. B24], but it does not breathe; all of it is *nous* and *phronesis* and eternal” (A1).^{xii} We should note particularly that “it does not breathe” because (according to our hypothesis) the fiery One of Pythagoras *did* breathe in the boundless “air or void.” Xenophanes confirms indirectly that Pythagoras himself held that the One breathes; this was not just a theory developed by later Pythagoreans. Xenophanes thought more carefully than Pythagoras about what sorts of activity could be carried on “eternally.” He was the first thinker to escape from Anaximander’s “*taxis* of Time.”

God knows everything at once and everywhere, in his universal spherical body, without moving or changing. But perhaps we can legitimately distinguish between his “seeing and hearing” and his *nous*. For Simplicios (who tells us explicitly that he does not have the text of the poems) must have found quotations in his Theophrastos, which assert first that God both thinks and moves all things without effort: “But without toil he swings all things by the understanding [or the action? (*phren*)] of his mind (*nous*)”; and, secondly, that he is himself unmoving in doing this: “Always he abides in the same place, moving not at all,/ Nor is it seemly for him to change his home to different places at different times” (B25, B26).^{xiii}

We have now reached the “Eleatic moment” in Xenophanes’ thought. If we imagine him arriving in the Pythagorean community of a fairly recently founded city with his scientific gospel of

a God who is in one aspect eternal *nous*, and absolutely unmoving; and on the other side, the conscious awareness of a great multitude of motions in time, which he “sees,” “hears” and “swings”^{xiv} without effort, motion or change on his own part, we can understand at once what an impact this separation of the two aspects would have on the thoughtful “Pythagorean” Parmenides — who already knows (or perhaps will soon learn) how Alkmaeon has distinguished between humans and other mortals.

Xenophanes himself does not have “mind” and “body” dualistically separated (and neither, we may guess, did Parmenides). The *demas* (physical figure) of God was the whole sphere, which was unmoving; inside the sphere there was a multitude of motions. This plurality was not God himself, but the world, the *kosmos* that he produces, controls and is sensibly aware of. In this other view of himself, the one God becomes many Gods — but, of course, there is a perfect harmony between them because they are all really aspects of the One. Thales was right to say that “all things are full of Gods”; and this insight is the proper assumption for a rational civil theology.^{xv}

4. Nature

Some of the assertions about Nature credited to Xenophanes, seem to be traditional “poetic common sense” of the kind that any poet from Homer onwards might have uttered. Thus, there seems to be no good reason to doubt that he said “From Earth are all things, and to Earth all things come in the end” (B27, cf. A36). But he did not mean that the other elements all originate from earth; he only meant (perhaps) that Earth is the common mother of all mortal life — just as he might have said that all rivers end up in the sea.^{xvi}

But what Xenophanes says about “earth and water” in combination points to an underlying concern with what we now call “scientific explanation.” God is in his heaven, unmoving and unchanging; but here on earth (and even in the heaven itself) God is effortlessly causing things to come to be — both immortally and mortally. The Milesians were eager to discover what they could

about how this happens; and Xenophanes carried on their work:^{xvii} “Earth and water are all things that come to be and grow”; “We all of us from earth and water came to birth” (21B 29 and 33).

Anaximander might have said something of this sort — though we have no evidence that he did. But, having got the unity of things out of the way — just as Anaximander did — Xenophanes wants to put ordinary empirical observation back in control of speculative theory. The divine Air, which does such miraculous things for Anaximenes, has much less to do in Xenophanes. (But we shall soon come to it.) He did apparently believe that the heavenly bodies “come to be and grow”; and water contributes to their growth, but not earth. So he is not talking about *them* in the two fragments here quoted. It is the whole order of “mortals” that comes from “earth and water,” and returns at the last to earth (and in their putrefying breakdown, to “water”).

All mortal life originated in the early mud (A33);^{xviii} and Xenophanes thought that earth and water were still getting mixed on a large scale on the surface of our Earth; the boundaries of sea and land were changing (A32).^{xix} In the past their relations have been very different; this is shown by the presence of fossilized sea-creatures on high land.

His theory of the earth’s history shows Xenophanes at his best; the theory of the heavenly bodies shows him at his worst. The reports — for whatever they are worth — seem to support the continual coming to be and passing away of things in the heaven. Theophrastos recorded that the Sun is a “massing of little fires” (or sparks) produced by moisture; and perhaps Xenophanes called it “a burning cloud” somewhere in the poems (A40). It is extinguished sometimes when it gets into a dry region of the air (A41a).^{xx} This is the particular reason for eclipses; the moon is extinguished too (during the monthly dark period). But the Moon is a solid object. It is “felted cloud,” says Xenophanes in his clearest concession to Anaximenes. But it has to be ignited and reignited; and that involves “water.” The Sun and the stars are “burning clouds”; and apparently the stars burn out each night but are reignited like coals on the next. This process probably involves a collaboration of Air and Fire. For the Sun burns out every day, and the requisite moisture is collected (overnight) for a new Sun the next morning (A38, A40-1, A41a, A43).^{xxi}

The Moon is quite useless to us — and presumably Xenophanes would reduce the emphasis upon it as much as possible in his civil piety (A42); but the Sun is vitally important to the generation and sustenance of all living things on Earth (A42).^{xxii} The Sun is the engine of our earthly weather-cycle. It draws up moisture from the sea — for all sweet water comes from this salty source (A46, B30).^{xxiii} The interaction of the Sun (Fire) and the Sea (Water) produces all rivers, winds and clouds. “Clouds” supply Xenophanes’ answer to all meteorological problems. Iris (the rainbow) is a special kind of cloud (B32);^{xxiv} and lightning is produced by some sort of motion in clouds, which causes them to shine (A45).^{xxv} Comets, shooting stars and meteors were (apparently) all explained as clouds (A44).^{xxvi} As far as the Heaven is concerned, Xenophanes is a faithful follower of Anaximenes.

Turning from the heavenly bodies, we must come now to the great puzzle in Xenophanes’ account of Nature: the extent of the Earth. Aristotle, who despised Xenophanes for his general naiveté, reports that Xenophanes said “that the earth below us is infinite” (A47). Empedokles attacked him for saying this (31B39); and Theophrastos duly searched out the relevant passage in the poems: “This upper limit of Earth is seen at our feet/ Pushing against the Air, but that below reaches to <the> Boundless” (B28).^{xxvii} I take this to mean that Xenophanes assumed that the entire bottom half of the Sphere was filled with Earth. In his *kosmos* — as in that of Anaximenes — nothing could go below the Earth.^{xxviii} Nor could anything go out into the Boundless; that is why we find, in one of our most puzzling reports, the curious intelligence that in Xenophanes’ view “the Sun goes forward to <the> Boundless, but appears to make a circle because of the distance” (41a).^{xxix} The Boundless (of Anaximander, transformed into the invisible Air by Anaximenes, but now restored to its original completely indefinite character) is what “encompasses” the Sphere. The Sun “goes forward” until it reaches the edge of the Sphere where it is extinguished.^{xxx} The Earth below us comes to an end at the corresponding (spherically determined) point. The Boundless has no positive function in Xenophanes. It is simply what is beyond (or outside) God.^{xxxi} The divine life is perfectly complete and self-sufficient. We do not need to be — and indeed, we cannot be — intelligently concerned with what is beyond it. Xenophanes agrees with the Pythagoreans about the primacy of “Limit.”

“God” is a Limit; but what is even more important is that we ourselves (and our cognitive capacities) are limited. Even where he agrees with them Xenophanes is no Pythagorean.

5. Knowledge and Opinion

Xenophanes is convinced that the new inquiries into the order of Nature which Thales began, have led us to a better understanding of God, and of our own relation to the divine life. He vigorously attacks the poetic tradition upon which popular religion is (intellectually) based; and his arguments are certainly very strong. When we come to his positive alternative, his scientific theology may seem to be conclusively preferable. But that was not how Xenophanes viewed the matter. He thinks that we can never be sure. In fact, he has reasons for thinking that his scientific theology is not, and never can be, *socially* adequate. (We cannot *prove* that he was himself fully conscious of this; but it is at least probable that he was.)

Belief, in general, is never quite certainly and unequivocally verified: “And what is quite clear, no man has seen, nor will there be one/ Who knows about the gods, and what I say about all things/ For even if one should chance most completely to say what has been fulfilled/ Still he himself does not know; but opinion is allotted to all” (B34).^{xxxii}

It is a simple, basic social fact that we all have opinions; and there is no way to confirm any claim about the phenomena of nature against all possible doubts. The later Sceptics admired Xenophanes, because although he was clearly a “dogmatist” about the natural order, he admitted that he did not have certain knowledge; and he argued that no one could have it. Even if one says what is true, one cannot “know” it (in the way that God “knows” it, if Xenophanes himself has managed to say what is true).

The impossibility of human “knowing” in the divine way, follows directly from the fact that belief (especially theological belief) is a social possession. God is unique and self-sufficient; but

there are many of us, and all of our opinions must be admitted. Pythagoras may be divinely inspired. He may be right in thinking that the whipped dog is a “friend” (B27).^{xxxiii} But we cannot “know” that, because we certainly do not *all* know it. There is no self-certifying privileged access to God. Hence Xenophanes denied the possibility of religious divination (A52). Scientifically, this denial is clearly implied by the theory of Anaximenes. But it becomes *explicit* in Xenophanes, because of his *social* concern with theology.

We should notice that Xenophanes’ arguments about knowledge are generally couched in the language of civil theology. It is “the gods” whom we do not clearly know about, “the gods” who “did not show us everything” (B18). “However many <things, truths?> they have made plain for mortals to look on <the Gods have concealed much else>” (B36).^{xxxiv} Some matters of human opinion are plain enough. Within vaguely understood limits Xenophanes holds that a direct sense experience can be trusted; but about things in the heavens (for instance) we can only make guesses — and the disagreements will continue.

There are one or two fragments that reflect on the reasons why human opinion is bound to vary. Partly it is a matter of the range of available experience: “If god [not “the gods”] had not generated yellow honey, they <mortals> would say that figs are much sweeter <than they usually think now>” (21B38). Partly, too, it is a function of age and maturity, which affects our normal desires: “and a young man would desire a young servant-girl <whereas someone else would desire something else>” (B42).^{xxxv}

Human knowledge can never be perfect because it requires a consensus that can never be perfect (or perfectly abiding). But if we can establish a peaceful society, we can continually increase both the amount of our imperfect knowledge and the extent of the consensus. History shows this: “Not indeed from the beginning did the gods show forth all things to mortals,/ But over time searching they find out what is better” (B18). Again we should notice the implicit rejection of special revelations, like that which was claimed by Pythagoras, soon to be followed by Herakleitos, Parmenides and Empedokles. But the important emphasis is on the gradual advance and

improvement of knowledge. Most of Xenophanes' theory of Nature was almost certainly taken over from Anaximenes. The principal improvement that he made was in substituting the interaction of two elements for the miraculous operation of one. But he knows that he is still a long way from the truth. If it is really true that he admired the astronomical work of Thales — and especially the prediction of the eclipse (B19)^{xxxvi} — it must have been either because he recognized Thales as the pioneer of natural inquiry, or because the prediction made natural inquiry universally visible and evidently important. In either case, the reporter has left out something vital.

Xenophanes' view of his own work is aptly characterized in a fragment which is so brief and ambiguous that it may have come from quite a different context: "Let these <statements?> be accepted then as like the veritable <truths?>, <but on the other hand> . . ." (B35). The use of the particle *men* here, logically guarantees that some contrasting reflection was coming; and there is one that we can offer (though it is certainly *not* what was coming in the original). Xenophanes' conception of God may be something like the scientific truth; but it is not adequate as a foundation for social life. This is because the "God's eye view" transcends all ethical considerations. There is no sign in what remains to us that God's effortless arrangement of the world is "good" or "just." As far as we can tell, Xenophanes was faithful to Anaximenes in this respect. He did not speak, like Anaximander, about cosmic justice and reparation. What happens by divine will is simply necessary. It is, of course, right and proper for us to regard "necessity" with reverence. But "good and evil" belong to our human perspective; and in that perspective we need to divide the divine unity into parts. So we have to have a civil theology with many gods. What is "always a good" is "to hold *the gods* in high regard" (B1 end).

Notes

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- i. All of the remains of Xenophanes will be found in English translation in J.H. Lesher [1992].
 - ii. Sometimes, no doubt, he had other purposes. Thus, we cannot now guess what the context of fragment 6 was. (It may have been part of Xenophanes' attack on the over-valuation of athletic prowess; or of his critique of non-philosophical poets. Or it may be sincere praise for some achievement of a now unidentifiable kind.)
 - iii. Compare B 45 as evidence that this was a fairly frequent topic in Xenophanes' occasional poetry.
 - iv. We can infer from Diogenes Laertios, IX, 20 (A 1) that the admiration was mutual.
 - v. The last line about theft etc. is repeated in B 12 with the preamble: "they sang of many illicit deeds of the gods."
 - vi. According to the report in B 4 Xenophanes thought that the Lydians were the first to coin money. This is probably another indication of his interest in barbarian ethical corruption. (Herodotos I, 94, agrees that the Lydians were the first to coin gold and silver — Xenophanes may have claimed that they were the first to have a bimetallic currency.)
 - vii. See the stories collected in 21 A 13; and compare the report of Aristotle (at note 10 below).

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- viii. At this point the civil theology begins to get mixed up with the scientific theology in the report. Eusebios continues: “and that none of them needs any of the others or anything at all. But he hears and sees as a whole, etc.” But the piece quoted in the text is independent of that. It is confirmed by the echo of Xenophanes in the *Heracles* of Euripides (lines 1341ff) which includes “it is not true that they go in chains, or that one god lords it over another” (see 21 C 1).
- ix. If we take the first two words as “One <is> God” it is at once evident that there is no conflict with the civil theology (in which there is not, and cannot be, a “greatest” God). We are simply moving to a different standpoint. So I take sides with those who think that the opening is a complete sentence — with maximum emphasis on “One.”
- x. The saying is not in verse, but it surely ought to count as a “fragment.” Compare 21 A 13 (on “saying that the gods die”). (There is a difficulty for “civil theology” here — see above, p. 000 [107, at note 7].)
- xi. The testimonies are collected by Guthrie (I, 376-377). (I suppose that they only show what Theophrastos said, because there is no one among the witnesses who definitely had access to the original poems.)
- xii. The direct quotation in Sextus reads: “Whole he sees, whole he knows, whole he hears” (21 B 24). If Xenophanes *was* contradicting someone else, it was not Anaximenes; the God of Anaximenes does not breathe — it makes the *kosmos* breathe. So *Pythagoras* is the obvious candidate.

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- xiii. Both passages are from Simplicios' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*.
- xiv. Or "shakes" (*kradainein*). Since this is done with the "mind" I think Guthrie is right to say (I, 383n) that the meaning is the same as in the "guiding" metaphor of Anaximander and Anaximenes — and the "steering" of Herakleitos (22 B 64). It is idle to object that in the poets the word has only a "physical" sense. Xenophanes is *correcting* the poets. He has only their vocabulary available, and he is trying to characterize *what they can see*. This "shaking" is done by the divine power. So it produces a great order of "guided missiles." (Zeus shakes everything with his nod in Homer; but the Gods continually come and go from Olympos; in the *Suppliant Women* 100-103 Aeschylus shows that he has learned Xenophanes' lesson.)
- xv. This is the best context for the interpretation of fragment 17: "and Bacchantes of pine stand round the well-built house." Nature itself is to be regarded as carrying branches in honor of Dionysos. The doctrine that "all things are full of Gods" provides a sounder reason for Xenophanes' recorded admiration for Thales (B 19) than the eclipse 'prediction.' All of popular religion must be rationalized into a whole that supports, inculcates and inspires civic virtue. The rational impact of Xenophanes can be seen in Books II and III of the *Republic* — but Xenophanes was even less of a "warlover" than Plato. (It is tempting to read 21 B 17 in the context of an "Orphic-Pythagorean" *domestication* of Dionysos. This can only be a *guess*, like the alternative interpretations discussed in Lesher's commentary — 1992, 95-96. But Xenophanes was certainly a *philosophical* devotee of Dionysos — and he knew what Pythagoras taught about our life in this "tomb.")
- xvi. We do have to suppose that Theophrastos cited this line, because it is only found in a late user of Aetios (Theodoretos). But this is not, in itself, surprising, since Xenophanes said several speculatively interesting things about "earth.")

- xvii. He may have been no more conscious than they were, of how “speculative” (in the *bad* sense) his efforts were. But his social concerns caused him to articulate this problem more clearly than they had done. Also, there may have been a critical reaction to Pythagoras (and even Parmenides?) involved.
- xviii. Xenophanes may have forecast a drowning end for our present world-order when the relation of earth and sea changes again; and perhaps he foresaw a continual pendulum swing of world-orders in the future.
- xix. 21 B 37 may be an expression of Xenophanes’ interest in the relations of earth and water. But there is not enough indication of the context for us to be sure.
- xx. As interpreted by P.J. Bicknell, in *Eranos*, 65, 1967, 73-77.
- xxi. It is fairly clear that Xenophanes had contact with Herakleitos — cf. 22 B 6. We can see from the account of “St. Elmo’s fire” in A 39 that Xenophanes is trying to follow an empirical analogy in his outrageously implausible theory of the Sun. (The reference to “moisture” in connection with combustion, reflects the fact that lamps burned olive-*oil*. Oil is a *liquid*, and is thus a form of “the wet.”)
- xxii. Was there perhaps something in one of the poems that suggested Plato’s mythical use of the Sun as “the offspring of the Good”?

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- xxiii. Diogenes Laertios (A 1) speaks of “vapor *from* the Sun.” Whatever *he* thought this meant, his source must have intended “vapor caused by the Sun.”
- xxiv. There is no reason to suppose that Xenophanes wants to “discredit traditional religion” here — as Guthrie, I, 392-393, supposes. If trees can be “Bacchants” (B 17), then for good citizens the rainbow can be (for instance) what “Moses” took it as (Genesis,).
- xxv. Lightning was, no doubt, the crucial phenomenon that convinced Xenophanes that moisture was involved in the genesis of the Sun’s fire. (This part of his theory was taken over by Herakleitos — or the movement of ideas *may* have been the other way.)
- xxvi. The fiery phenomena fit into the hypothesis proposed in note 25. But if “meteors” refers to the stony relics of “shooting stars,” we must wonder whether Aetios is overgeneralizing in his report, because these relics are obviously “earthy” bodies.)
- xxvii. *Es apeiron* is the regular Greek expression for *ad infinitum* (infinitely or indefinitely). I have rendered it in the way in which I think Xenophanes meant it — but the reader should be warned that mine is a lone voice. In the literature the debate between “to infinity” and “indefinitely” bids fairly to be endless. (See Guthrie, I, 381 n 1 for the orthodox view that comes closest to mine.)
- xxviii. In A 32 we read: “he declares also that the Earth is unbounded, and is not surrounded in every part by the air.” If my interpretation is correct, Xenophanes added this (after B 28) because he wanted to correct the “lid-theory” of the Earth proposed by Anaximenes. The “sphere” does, therefore, come from Anaximenes; but the Earth is not a flat plate in the middle of it.

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- xxix. As we know from other reports, the Sun burns out at sunset. So it does not “go forward infinitely”; and I find Guthrie’s consequent preference for “indefinitely” impossibly sophisticated. If my view is rejected, I think we must say that Xenophanes’ poems were inconsistent (or not intelligible) on this point. (Either view is quite plausible!)
- xxx. If we can trust the curious locution used for the solar eclipse in A 41a, “treading on emptiness” (“stepping in a hole” as Guthrie neatly puts it, I, 393), the Boundless is conceived by Xenophanes as a *Void*. If my hypothesis is correct, this locution was introduced (for the “encompassing Air” of Anaximenes) by Pythagoras. But in Xenophanes it takes on a strictly literal meaning. When the Sun reaches the Void, there is nothing to feed its fire. So it goes out; and the fuel for a new one has to be collected on the other side of the *kosmos*; in an eclipse, the fuel runs short briefly, so the Sun flickers out but lights up again quickly.
- xxxi. This is clearly how it was regarded by Pythagoras. (One of the two may have suggested this view to the other; but quite possibly, they were simply delighted to find that they agreed about it.)
- xxxii. A 24 indicates that this famous quotation was half of an antithesis: mortals can only have opinion, but God knows the truth. Compare Alkmaeon, 24 B 1 — if the younger man was educated by the Pythagoreans, it may well have been the wandering bard who undermined his rationalist allegiance. (Parmenides was more resolute.)
- xxxiii. There is no need to assume that Xenophanes was jeering at “transmigration” in this fragment. Sympathy with the belief in a total community of sensible life would be perfectly consistent with his “civil theology.”

xxxiv. Herodian the grammarian, second century, clearly had the poems, but he did not care what they asserted. My proposed interpretation is only a guess — but compare Alkmaeon 24 B 1 and Herakleitos 22 B 55 and 101a.

xxxv. Like B 36 and B 38 this comes from Herodian. (For the way in which human wishes enter into the formation of their theological opinions, see above [just after note 8].)

xxxvi. Why this late report in Diogenes Laertios should have been dignified as a “fragment” passes my comprehension. It seems to me certain that it is either incomplete or confused in some important respect. Compare note 15 above).