

Xenophanes Christianus?

M. J. Edwards

HISTORIES OF PHILOSOPHY typically include chapters on the period 'from Thales to Plato' which obscure the fact that Plato's writings are the earliest extant in Greek philosophy. Most of our information about his predecessors dates from the Roman Empire, and is apt to receive the most uncritical treatment in such histories. At times the sources paraphrase, at other times they quote, but even then not with sufficient notice of the context to permit the redressing of error or prejudice in their interpretations. Philosophers quote their predecessors to illustrate the antiquity of their own opinions or, if the predecessor is unfriendly, to dispel the authority of his august name with such instruments as rhetoric can procure. If some readers were content with obloquy and ridicule, there were others whom citation, even if partial and unseasonable, was more likely to persuade.

When Christians take up an ancient author, they know that a Christian audience will suspect him, while a pagan will applaud.¹ In the first case, the purpose is to reveal to other Christians that an unbaptized philosopher is at the root of some prevailing heresy; in the second, pagans are required to learn that what they most abhor in Christianity was anticipated by the best of the Greeks.² The latter case is attested by citations of the sixth-century B.C. Xenophanes of Colophon in the *Stromateis* of the late second-century apologist Clement of Alexandria. I shall argue here that although these quotations serve their purpose,

¹ See J. P. Hershbell, "Hippolytus' *Elenchus* as a Source for Empedocles Reconsidered," *Phronesis* 18 (1973) 97-114, 187-203; C. Osbourne, *Rethinking Early Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge 1987). For appraisals of pagan doxography cf. e.g. J. P. Hershbell, "Plutarch as a Source for Empedokles, Re-examined," *AJP* 92 (1971) 156-84; G. E. L. Owen, "Philosophical Invective," *OxStAncPhil* 1 (1983) 1-26.

² On the character of Alexandrian Christianity see S. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria* (Oxford 1971); on the aims and resources of the apologists see J. Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, tr. J. A. Baker (London 1975).

they are unlikely to be genuine. The case rests first on the records of Xenophanes in the least impeachable sources, then on inquiry into the consistency of Clement's citations with these findings, and finally on the doubtful contexts of these testimonies.³

I

If Xenophanes can be shown to have believed anything, it was that gods are in all respects superior to men. Even to talk of gods would seem to be only a concession to the idiom of contemporaries, for, although Xenophanes can allude to 'gods' who have hidden certain things from human speculation (B18; cf. B34.2), the doxographies of pagans, such as Aristotle, Cicero, Diogenes Laertius, Sextus Empiricus, and Plutarch, make him monolatrous and in some sense pantheistic.⁴ "He sees, he thinks, he hears as a whole," according to a line preserved by Sextus (B24; cf. D.L. 9.19=A19); gazing at the firmament with a sublime intuition of unity, says Aristotle, Xenophanes declared that "the All is God" (*Metaph.* 986b=A19).

Among his remains is a statement that God shakes all things by the *phren* of his *nous* (B25): ἀλλ' ἀπάνευθε πόνοιο νόου φρενὶ πάντα κραδαίνει. This motion is like that caused by the nod of Zeus in the *Iliad*, for, while the minds of gods and men in Homer are also instruments of feeling, that of Zeus is set apart by its power to give immediate execution to his will.⁵ Even if, as Darcus holds, the *phren* stands for the effective operation of the intellect, while the *nous* is its cognitive faculty,⁶

³ The fragments of Xenophanes will be cited from Diels-Kranz, *Vorsokr.*⁶ I (Berlin 1951). This text is employed with little apparatus by M. Untersteiner, *Senofane, Testimonianze e frammenti* (Florence 1956).

⁴ On the conventionality of the plural form see e.g. Guthrie, *Hist. Gk. Phil.* I (Cambridge 1962) 375f. Most uses simply take up words of others (e.g. in epic or festivals), and where this is not obviously the case (as in B18), we do not know whether the poet wrote *in propria persona*. The evidence of the doxographers is unanimously in favor of one god.

⁵ See K. Reinhardt, *Parmenides und die Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie* (Bonn 1916) 112ff; J. Warden, "The Mind of Zeus," *JHistIdeas* 32 (1971) 3-14. G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, rev. M. Schofield (Cambridge 1983) 170f, declare that Xenophanes alludes to Homer only by negation, but this seems to me too strong. His monotheism is rather, as they also say, a "bold development" of the old belief.

⁶ S. M. Darcus, "The *Phren* of the *Nous* in Xenophanes' God," *SymbOslo* 83 (1978) 25-39.

Xenophanes' notion of the deity is clearly a refinement of the epic one; nevertheless, he is at some pains to say that Zeus is not this deity. For to Zeus and the other gods Homer and Hesiod had imputed every kind of vice and injury, which could not be predicated of a god (B 11):

πάντα θεοῖς ἀνέθηκαν Ὀμηρός θ' Ἡσίοδος τε,
ὅσσα παρ' ἀνθρώποισιν ὀνειδέα καὶ ψόγος ἐστίν,
κλέπτειν μοιχεύειν τε καὶ ἀλλήλους ἀπατεύειν.

The story that Xenophanes was a rhapsode need not, even if it were verified, be inconsistent with his criticisms.⁷ The ancient notices of Xenophanes and the invention of allegory by his contemporary Theagenes of Rhegium both suggest that such protests were incipient in this period, since all known allegorical writing proposes or implies the defence of myth.⁸ Thus, so far, the poet of Colophon believed in only one god, who surpassed the epic Zeus in power and did not share his faults.

II

With this pagan evidence the Christian sorts well, yet not so perfectly as modern scholars often imply. The following citations are consecutively attributed to Xenophanes in Clement, *Strom.* 5.109.1 (=B23, 14):⁹

- (1) εἷς θεὸς ἔν τε θεοῖς καὶ ἀνθρώποισι μέγιστος,
οὔτι δέμας θνητοῖσιν ὁμοίος οὐδὲ νόημα.
- (2) ἀλλ' οἱ βροτοὶ δοκέουσι γεννᾶσθαι θεοὺς
τὴν σφετέρην δ' ἐσθῆτα ἔχειν φωνὴν τε δέμας τε.

Eusebius (*Praep. Evang.* 13.13.36) attempted to turn the first line, an iambic trimeter, into an hexameter without success.¹⁰

⁷ D.L. 9.18=A19; R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship I* (Oxford 1968) 8f.

⁸ On Theagenes see Pfeiffer (*supra* n.7); for recent bibliography see H. Schibli, *Pherekydes of Syros* (Oxford 1990) 99 n.54.

⁹ Text from the edition by O. Staehlin, *Clemens Alexandrinus* (Berlin 1960) II 399f.

¹⁰ Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 13.13.36: ἀλλὰ βροτοὶ δοκέουσι θεοὺς γεννᾶσθαι, which Bergk supplements with ὁμοίως.

Bergk did better, but as the trimeter also appears in Theodoret's *Curatio* (3.72), it evidently stood in Clement's text. Diels–Kranz and Staehlin, in editing Clement, therefore ignored the emendation.

(3) ἀλλ' εἴ τοι χεῖρας γ' εἶχον βόες ἢ λέοντες
 ἢ γράψαι χεῖρεσσι καὶ ἔργα τελεῖν ἄπερ ἄνδρες,
 ἵπποι μὲν θ' ἵπποισι βόες δέ τε βουσὶν ὁμοίας
 καὶ (κε) θεῶν ιδέας ἔγραφον καὶ σώματ' ἐποίουν
 τοιαῦθ' οἶόν περ καὶ τοὶ δέμας εἶχον.

Staehlin's version (*Strom.* 5.109.3=B 15), reproduced here, includes the particle γε in the first line. Eusebius offers a somewhat different reading, for which various emendations (perhaps unnecessary) have been suggested.¹¹

At *Strom.* 7.22 Clement paraphrases an otherwise unknown couplet¹² stating that men of different races and different features are always apt to make their deities like themselves. The Christian apologist can thus infer an attack upon idolatry, but the portion of the text that is most clearly a quotation does not refer to painting, and what use Xenophanes made of his observation remains uncertain.

Clement is the first to cite these testimonies but omits those preserved by others. Among the traits peculiar to this little Christian library three arouse doubt of its origin in the archaic period:

(1) It is difficult to imagine how the first line of fragment 2 (above) could have become an iambic trimeter by accident, yet

¹¹ *Praep. Evang.* 13.13.36: ἀλλ' εἰ χεῖρας ἔχον βόες, ἢ λέοντες. This will pass as a fragment of a hexameter, though Diels–Kranz, assuming that the beginning of the quotation is the beginning of a line, write ἀλλ' εἰ χεῖρας ἔχον βόες < ἵπποι τ' > ἢ λέοντες, in which they have been followed by numerous scholars.

¹² The original wording is: τὰς μορφὰς αὐτῶν ὁμοίας ἑαυτοῖς ἕκαστοι διαζωγραφοῦσιν, ὡς φησιν ὁ Ξ. Αἰθίοπες τε μέλανας σιμούς τε Θρηκίκες τε πυρροὺς καὶ γλαυκοὺς. Diels–Kranz, Untersteiner, and others have Xenophanes say:

Αἰθίοπες τε (θεοὺς σφετέρους) σιμούς μέλανας τε
 Θρηκίκες τε γλαυκοὺς καὶ πυρροὺς (φασὶ πέλεσθαι).

Aristotle's observation that men make the gods resemble themselves in manner as in feature (*Pol.* 1252b25ff) need not depend upon Xenophanes, whom he does not name.

if these lines are by Xenophanes, it cannot have been one in origin. Xenophanes' fragments are all in elegiacs or in uniform hexameters; and even if he, like Solon and Archilochus, wrote iambics, no poet of this age or any other uses alternating trimeters and hexameters as a regular form of verse.¹³

(2) The locution εἷς θεός is otherwise unattested in Xenophanes or in any other of the most ancient Greek philosophers, and, to judge by his other doxographers, Xenophanes was not so partial to εἷς as to ἓν.¹⁴ He would appear to have employed the definite article to denote the God who was both One and All.¹⁵ If it is indeed ancient, this is perhaps the only use of εἷς to indicate, not absolute singularity, but only superiority to other beings in a numerous class. It would also contradict the philosopher's axiom, which more than one authority ascribes to him, that no god can be subject to the power of any other; for such a principle makes it inconceivable that one among the gods should rule the rest.¹⁶

(3) The word δέμας, though attested only here in the remains of this philosopher, occurs on all three occasions when his words are quoted in meter. The intent is to proscribe the use of images, a practice that philosophers of the archaic and classical periods were not accustomed to condemn, although they can hardly have applauded it. Heraclitus scorned the mysteries, and was followed by both Plato (e.g. *Rep.* 364C–65A) and the Derveni commentator;¹⁷ Plato, as indignant as Xenophanes to hear of Homeric gods whose passions led them into adultery, mendacity, and murder (e.g. *Euthphr.* 6B–C), does not single out

¹³ The attested works of Xenophanes include his *Silloi* and *On Nature*: see Kirk and Raven (*supra* n.5) 166f. Diogenes Laertius (9.18) attributes to him epic, elegiac, and iambic compositions.

¹⁴ A30 (=Arist. *Met.* 986b), 31 (=Simpl. *in Phys.* 22.22), 34 (=Cic. *Acad.* 2.118), 35 (=Timon fr.59), 36 (=Theodoret, *Curatio* 4.8). Both εἷς and ἓν appear frequently in the *De Xenophane, Melisso et Gorgia* (hereafter 'De XMG'), but this is agreed by all to be too late and too tendentious to be a source of ipsissima verba. W. Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (Oxford 1947) 52, notes that this tract demonstrates the existence of one Being, not one God. In view of what is argued here, we cannot rely on A33=Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 1.14.

¹⁵ Frequent in *De XMG*; see also Arist. *Met.* 986b; Timon fr.60.

¹⁶ *De XMG* 977a24–32; A31 (=Simpl. *in Phys.* 22.22), 32 (=Plutarch *ap.* Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 1.8.4). For an attempt to make a formal argument of these asseverations see J. Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers* I (Oxford 1979) 86–89.

¹⁷ See Heraclitus B5 D.–K.; *P.Derv.* col. xvi, as in the appendix to *ZPE* 47 (1982).

the plastic representations of divinities as a fraud proving the blindness of the artist, and it seems that no one in the archaic and classical periods denounced the civic images because they claimed to depict the physiognomy of gods.

Heraclitus can indeed be cited on the insanity of addressing prayers to images, but it is uncertain whether the anthropomorphic character of these images was important to his argument.¹⁸ Epicureans later opined that the proper features of the gods appeared in images, but endorsed no cult of either. In the strictures confirmed as authentic, the acts, not the visual representations of the gods, engage Xenophanes; and Homer never describes Zeus' face, only his nod, ambrosial locks, thunderbolt, and declamations.

III

These considerations induce a suspicion only intensified by a study of Clement's source. A long inventory of passages ascribed to other philosophers and dramatists testifying to the unity of the godhead follows the citations from Xenophanes peculiar to Clement. Many of these also occur in the *De Monarchia* once assigned to Justin,¹⁹ and thus the conclusion is that both witnesses used a Christian or Jewish florilegium. Such collections are regularly posited when the same citations from ancient texts occur in a number of authors of only moderate learning;²⁰ this one must have been copied under indifferent supervision, since couplets of one testimony in Clement will belong to another in the *De Monarchia*, and in a sequence of quotations of the same passages from New Comedy scarcely one is attributed to the same hand. Some could not be attributed with confidence to any classical author: the homiletic fustian laid at the door of Aeschylus and Sophocles is as spurious as the songs that a pure and monotheistic audience is made to intone to the Deity in these and other apologetic texts.²¹

¹⁸ E. Bevan's citation of Heraclitus B5 D.-K. in *Holy Images* (London 1940) 65 therefore seems incautious.

¹⁹ Text edited by C. Otto, *S. Justini Opera Addubitata* (Jena 1879) 126-58; *De Monarchia* 104b-09c corresponds to Clem. Al. *Strom.* 5.119.2-126.1.

²⁰ See H. Chadwick, "Florilegium," *RAC* 7 (1969) 1144f.

²¹ *De Monarchia* 104e-105b (=Kern, *Orph. fr.* no. 245), 104af (= [Aesch.] fr.464 Nauck), 104cf (= [Soph.] fr.1025 Nauck). On the citation attributed to Euripides see now C. Riedweg, "TGrF 2.624—A Euripidean Fragment," *CQ* n.s. 40 (1990) 124-36.

A similar collection is employed in the *Cohortatio ad Gentiles*, also falsely attributed to Justin.²² Many Jewish or Christian impostures were clad with the name of Orpheus, and that of the Sybil covered even more than the fourteen books that now survive.²³ In these fraudulent lucubrations the traits noted above as untypical of Xenophanes and his period can be illustrated, even to excess:

(1) The trimeter was one of the tools most frequently employed in Christian forgery, since tragedy and comedy were among the most freely imitated models. Hexameter, on the other hand, was the staple of Sibylline and Orphic poetry, and had been the only meter permitted to philosophers (*i.e.*, Parmenides, Empedocles, and Lucretius).²⁴ A forger with little skill in composition might have aimed to write hexameters, yet would be obliged to let trimeters stand in place of the line that his abilities did not equip him to construct.

(2) The formula εἰς θεός was the cornerstone of many Christian and Jewish fabrications of late antiquity:²⁵

- (a) εἰς ταῖς ἀληθείαισιν, εἰς ἐστὶν θεός
- (b) εἰς ἐστ' αὐτογενής, ἑνὸς ἕκγονα πάντα τέτυκται
- (c) εἴ τις ἐρεῖ θεός εἰμι πάρεξ ἑνός οὗτος ὀφείλει
κόσμον ἴσον τούτῳ στήσας εἰπεῖν Ἐμὸς οὗτος.

All these specimens differ from fr.1 above in declining to allow the existence of another deity. The florilegium was, however, prepared to admit such genuine examples of Greek piety as a passage from the *Ion* of Euripides, commending sincere devotion to “the gods” (452ff *ap. De Monarchia* 108bf), and Clement transcribes a passage in which Orpheus pays his

²² Text in Otto (*supra* n.19) 18–127 at 15c–18d (=chapters 15–19).

²³ See the editions by J. H. F. Friedlieb (Leipzig 1852) and C. Alexandre (Paris 1841) with commentary (Paris 1856); for translation and commentary, R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament II: Pseudepigrapha* (Oxford 1913), remains the most informative. On the composition of the Sibylline Oracles see now D. Potter, *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire* (Oxford 1990) 94–140.

²⁴ Xenophanes is the exception, if indeed his elegiac fragments can be called philosophical.

²⁵ For the following see *De Monarchia* 104c (=Cohortatio 18a=Clem. Al. *Strom.* 5.113.1=[Soph.] fr. 1025 Nauck), 105a (=Cohortatio 15d=Orph. fr. 245.8), 105c. I cite only texts appearing in the common florilegium; examples from the *Sibyllina* are barely numerable.

devoirs to “the greatest of the gods,” who causes earth and heaven to tremble (*Strom.* 5.125.1=*Orphica fr.* 248.3 Kern). When Moses speaks at Exodus 7.1 of his being made a god to the Pharaoh, Philo remarks that the sacred Word is not so superstitious as to withhold from man a title that was not, in any case, a true appellation of the Deity; and even in the Old Testament a celebrated psalm (82.1, 6) described a parliament of the *elohim* in which Yahweh was supreme.

In the Roman era it would have been thought legitimate to speak of God as single, yet conceive him as one of many. As seen from the acclamations showered upon the hero of Lucian’s *Death of Peregrinus*, to style a man ‘the one’ of his kind might signify that he possessed a certain property, not uniquely, but in an unusual measure.²⁶ The One God and the many, as we have seen, appear to have been alternative formulations in Xenophanes; but in a later period, the formula εἷς θεός would allow a man to retain belief in many gods, while asserting the supremacy of one.

(3) The attacks on the use of images came from all quarters during the Roman Empire, when Dio of Prusa, Maximus of Tyre, and Philostratus were all required to devise new arguments in its defence.²⁷ As the chief concern here is with forgeries, the sarcasms of Christians and Jews (not the sole accusers) may be illustrated from Orpheus and the Sibyl:

θητοὶ δὲ πολλοὶ καρδίαν πλανώμενοι
 ἰδρυσάμεσθα πημάτων παραψυχάς
 (*De Monarchia* 104c=[Soph.] fr.1025 Nauck).

ἔργα δὲ χειροποίητα γεραίρομεν ἄφρονι θυμῷ
 εἶδωλα ξοάνων τε καταφθιμένων ἀνθρώπων
 (*Sibyllina, Proem.* 1.6=*Cohortatio* 16e).

Such examples are indeed superfluous, for what Jew or Christian did not think it his duty to declaim against idolatry?

²⁶ See the commentary of E. Schwartz (Paris 1951) 97f on *Peregrinus* 15; E. Peterson, *EΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ* (Göttingen 1926).

²⁷ Dio Chrys. *Or.* 12; Max. Tyr. *Philosophumena* 2 (Hobein); Philostr. *VA* 6.19. The reference to Phidias in these discussions is not proof of their antiquity; the absence of a common argument, however, may suggest that they are new.

The works of the apologists might be opened at any page for corroboration of this charge, always the first leveled, whether in ignorance or with disingenuous scholarship, against the pagan culture of their own or a previous day.

An objection to the theory of Christian provenance might be founded on a certain interpretation of fr.1, according to which God is unlike man in intellect and body. Darcus infers that since he has an intellect, though unlike man's, he will also have a body of his own.²⁸ Would not a Christian forger (or a Jew) have been at pains to make it obvious that God does not have a shape of any kind?

The objection can be met by one or a combination of four replies: (1) the resources of the forger would be too limited to allow so close a reading of his verses; (2) not to possess a body is one way in which a being may be unlike humans 'in respect of body'; (3) not all Christians held that God is strictly incorporeal, though all agreed that any body assigned to him would be more refined than ours;²⁹ (4) at least one Orphic fragment, known to be a forgery, asserts that the body of God enfolds the world.³⁰

IV

Thus Christian fabricators of such testimony used all the unusual traits of Clement's testimonies from Xenophanes. It is plausible to conclude that, if Clement differs from other sources on Xenophanes, it is because he is not a true source. As the first Greek, or at least the first known Greek, to have denied that a god partakes of vice or weakness, Xenophanes could not evade the hospitality of Christian handbooks. This new society forced him to renounce his archaic manners: trimeter and hexameter took the place of elegiacs, new tropes and new vocabulary supported a novel quarrel with the idols,

²⁸ Darcus (*supra* n.6) 26; cf. Guthrie (*supra* n.4) 376f, who adduces texts indicating that the body of the Deity would be spherical. There is, as I show, no reason to dispute the authenticity of these testimonies, but exact quotations are wanting.

²⁹ On Tert. *De carne Christi* 11 etc. see J. Daniélou, *The Origins of Latin Christianity*, tr. J. A. Baker (London 1977) 214–23.

³⁰ Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 13.12, citing Aristobulus; cf. *Cohortatio* 18.

and to the one God of theism were addressed the acclamations that his Presocratic verses had bestowed upon the All.

NEW COLLEGE, OXFORD

September, 1991