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LECTURE IX

FROM THALES TO XENOPHANES

WE have already seen that the gradual evolution of theological and religious thought in Greece, so far as it is reflected in Greek literature down to the time of Euripides, follows two for the most part distinct and independent paths. On the one hand, we have the poetical development, culminating in the drama of Sophocles; and, on the other hand, there is the philosophical development, which reaches, perhaps, its highest point in the Anaxagorean doctrine of *Nous*. Up to the present, we have confined ourselves almost exclusively to the poets; but we must now desert the Muses for Philosophy.

The first three thinkers of whom we have to treat are Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, who flourished at Miletus in the sixth century before Christ. With the general character of their doctrine we are not concerned: it will suffice to remind you that they each attempted to explain the universe from a single cosmogonical principle, which Thales identified with water, Anaximander with the "boundless" or "Infinite," a material substance of infinite extent, and Anaximenes with air. They do not touch on ethical questions at all; and such subjects as the moral being and attributes of God lie outside the range of their inquiries. But they are nevertheless credited with certain theological

or quasi-theological beliefs, which deserve attention both for their own sakes, and also because they appear in some instances to anticipate or foreshadow later and more advanced conceptions; and these, or the most important of them, it is now our duty to examine.

Let us begin with Thales. The solitary theological doctrine which we seem to be justified in ascribing to Thales, is expressed in the words, "All things are full of Gods."¹ Unfortunately, it is not possible to decide for certain whether this saying has any relation to Thales' cosmological views, or whether, as Professor Burnet² and M. Bovet³ suppose, it is only a "mere apophthegm of the common type," "a passing expression of Thales' religious sentiment," without any organic connexion with the physical doctrine of the philosopher. It bears a curious resemblance to the remark attributed to Heraclitus when inviting some friends to enter the room where he was sitting: "Even here," said he, "there are Gods."⁴ According to the conjecture of Aristotle,⁵—for it is a conjecture and nothing more,—Thales had in his mind the philosophical conception of an indwelling soul, mingled with the structure of the universe; and this conjecture receives perhaps a little support from another passage of the *de Anima*, in which Aristotle mentions that Thales was believed to have said, "The magnetic stone is possessed of a soul, because it moves the iron."⁶ If Aristotle's conjecture is correct, the germs of the Platonic and Stoic belief in a World-soul, sustaining and moving all that is, are as old as Thales; and we find the maturest form of the doctrine ascribed to Thales by Stobaeus, where he says: "Thales believed that God is the intellect (*νοῦς*) of the world; that the universe is

¹ Arist. *de An.* i. 5. 411^a 8.

² *Early Greek Philosophy* p. 45.

³ *Le Dieu de Platon* p. 88.

⁴ Arist. *de part. An.* i. 5. 645^a

17 ff. Cf. Diog. Laert. ix. 7.

⁵ *de An.* i. c.

⁶ i. 2. 405^a 19 ff.

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WE have already seen that the gradual evolution of theological and religious thought in Greece, so far as it is reflected in Greek literature down to the time of Euripides, follows two for the most part distinct and independent paths. On the one hand, we have the poetical development, culminating in the drama of Sophocles; and, on the other hand, there is the philosophical development, which reaches, perhaps, its highest point in the Anaxagorean doctrine of *Nous*. Up to the present, we have confined ourselves almost exclusively to the poets; but we must now desert the Muses for Philosophy.

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⁵ *de An.* l.c.

⁶ i. 2. 405^a 19 ff.

at once alive and full of spirits ; and that a divine power permeates the elementary moisture and communicates to it motion." ¹ That Stoic influence is here at work, no one will deny ; but the conjecture of Aristotle stands on a somewhat different footing ; and if it is true that Thales ascribed a soul to the magnet, he may possibly have believed, as Aristotle supposed he did believe, that movement in general is a result of life or soul. ² Nor is it otherwise than in harmony with the general character of early Ionic hylozoism to conceive of the universe as alive, because the original elements, water, air, and so on, out of which the hylozoists construct the universe, perform the function of efficient as well as of material causes, and are therefore in a certain sense themselves endowed with energy and life. But it must be allowed that the words of Thales, taken by themselves, and apart from the explanation of Aristotle, appear to be only a pious sentiment ; and historians of philosophy are now for the most part disinclined to attach to the dictum any philosophical significance at all.

The *ἄπειρον* or "Infinite" of Anaximander is, primarily speaking, a physical concept, being nothing but the infinite or boundless matter which he regarded as the elementary substance out of which the world is produced. The first step towards the formation of a cosmos is when certain pairs of opposites, the hot and the cold, the dry and the moist etc., have been separated out from the *ἄπειρον*. ³ What particular kind of matter Anaximander had in view when speaking of the "Infinite," we are nowhere told by the philosopher himself ; and many different theories have been advanced. ⁴ All that can with certainty be affirmed is that he did not identify the "Infinite"

¹ Diels, *Doxographi Graeci* p. 301^b.

² Cf. Plato, *Laws* 899 B.

³ Diels, *f. d. Vorsokr.* ² i. p. 13, §§ 9, 10.

⁴ See Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* p. 52 ff.

with any of the four elements. The only question which concerns us in these lectures is whether Anaximander's concept has any relations with theology. In the first place, then, it is no mere dead matter, but a living substance, possessed of eternal motion, and indebted to itself alone for that process of separation which brings the cosmos into being; and, in the second place, Anaximander described it as "immortal and imperishable," "eternal and ageless," "encompassing and steering all things," "encompassing all the worlds."¹ If we remember that the Infinite to Anaximander represents the ultimate cause, and that immortality was always believed by the Greeks to be an attribute of the Godhead, we shall be disposed to see in these characterisations a tendency to identify the Infinite with God; and Aristotle evidently holds that Anaximander's Infinite is in point of fact the same as "the divine" (*τὸ θεῖον*).² According to this interpretation, we must attribute to Anaximander the same pantheistic conception of the universe which Aristotle, whether rightly or wrongly, attributed, as we saw, to Thales; and I think we can support this conclusion by some further evidence. In a passage of the *de Natura Deorum*, which has been much discussed in connexion with the theology of Anaximander, Cicero says: "It is the opinion of Anaximander that there are created Gods, rising and disappearing at long intervals, and that these are the innumerable worlds."³ The "innumerable worlds," as Professor Burnet has in my opinion proved, are coexistent, or partially coexistent, and not a series or chain of worlds rushing in swift succession "from creation to decay." Professor Burnet's suggestion that the "long intervals" are intervals of space and not of time, appears to me to be supported

¹ Diels, *l.c.* i. p. 14, § 15; p. 13, § 11.

² Diels *l.c.*

³ *l.* 25. Cicero is apparently following Philodemus or the authority on which he relied. See Diels, *Doz.* p. 121 ff., 531.

by a passage in Stobaeus, which shows that Anaximander had considered the subject of the *intermundia* or distances between the worlds.¹ But the point with which we are more particularly concerned relates to this doctrine of "created Gods," — a doctrine which, in a different shape, recurs again in the *Timaeus* of Plato. In Plato the "created Gods" are so called in contrast to the one and uncreated God, who is their father and begetter; and we can hardly avoid the conclusion that Anaximander had a similar contrast in his mind when he called the innumerable worlds begotten or created Gods. Where then are we to look for Anaximander's uncreated Deity? The only possible reply is, to the Infinite or boundless, out of which the created Gods arise, and into which they return again at death. It is therefore probable, to say the least, that Anaximander deified the "Infinite."

For the rest, it need only be remarked that Anaximander anticipates Heraclitus by representing Justice in the light of a cosmic agency or power. "At death things pass into that from which they were born, according to what is ordained; for they make reparation and recompense to one another for their injustice at the appointed time."² The notion, you will observe, is that the "opposites," which have been separated out of the *ἀπειρον*, are apt to encroach on one another's sphere, and pay the penalty by being reabsorbed.

Anaximenes differs from Anaximander, and resembles Thales, in so far as he derives the world from one of the four elements. The primary matter he declared to be air, infinite in quantity and possessed of eternal motion or life, by means of which it is transformed into a cosmos through the agency of rarefaction and condensation.³

¹ Diels, *Dox.* p. 329^b 1 ff.

² Diels ² i. p. 18, § 5.

³ Diels ² i. p. 13, § 9. Cf. Her. *fr.*
29.

We are told by Cicero that Anaximenes pronounced air to be a God (*aera deum statuit*);¹ and the statement is all the more credible, if Anaximenes, as the ancients believed, was a pupil or associate of Anaximander. Towards the end of the fifth century before Christ, the physical theory of Anaximenes was revived by Diogenes of Apollonia, who certainly deified the element of air; but it is hardly permissible to reason from the later to the earlier thinker, because in this, as in other parts of his philosophy, Diogenes may have been influenced by the Anaxagorean concept of a world-forming and world-upholding *Nous*. The argument from the doctrine of "created Gods," however, is one that applies to Anaximenes as well as to Anaximander; for Anaximenes also held this doctrine.²

One of the surviving fragments of Anaximenes' book is remarkable as the earliest example in Greek philosophy of the favourite argument from man to the universe. The fragment runs thus: "Even as our soul, which is air, holds us together, so breath (*πνεῦμα*) and air encompass the whole universe."³ The world, you will observe, is conceived of as a living, breathing whole, like the human frame; and just as we inhale from outside the breath that constitutes our soul, so also the world respires into the surrounding air. The substance as well as the method of Anaximenes' argument deserves to be carefully noted; for the philosopher has clearly in view something akin to the later conception of a soul of the world.⁴

At this point I will invite you to pause and take a retrospect. As we survey the somewhat barren landscape over which we have travelled, two features appear to arrest our attention. In the first place, each of these three thinkers derives the world from a single, self-

¹ *de Nat. Deor.* i. 26; cf. Diels, *Dox.* 302^b 5; 531^b 2.

² Diels² i. p. 19, § 10.

³ *fr.* 2 Diels².

⁴ With *περιέχει* we may perhaps compare Plato, *Tim.* 36 E (*περικαλύψασα*).

sufficient cause, both uncreated and imperishable, at once material and spiritual, or rather, let us say, possessed of life; and, in the second place, there is a disposition to identify this cause with God. The latter of these statements has been emphatically contradicted by M. Bovet, who maintains that "the idea of God had, properly speaking, no place in any philosophical system anterior to that of Plato."¹ It is obvious that everything here depends on what is meant by "properly speaking." The positive evidence for holding that Anaximander and Anaximenes, not to speak of later pre-Platonic thinkers, conceived of their elementary principles as divine, appears to me deserving of more consideration; but in any case—and for us this is the all-important point—they certainly assign to their elementary substances a variety of attributes and functions which were afterwards ascribed to the Deity. The belief in a single world-creating principle, itself uncreated and immortal, to a certain extent foreshadows the conception of God as the one creative and eternal Being, not, indeed, transcendent, but immanent in the world. The full development of this idea is still to come; but it is important to observe that Greek philosophy contained from the first some elements which were bound to bring it into conflict with Greek polytheism, and which were at the same time capable of developing into a more comprehensive and profound theology than anything that the so-called "Bible of the Greeks" provided.

The way for such a revolt against the authority of Homer was already being prepared by the dissemination of Orphic religious ideas during the second half of the sixth century B.C. I have dealt with this subject in a former lecture, and need only remind you now that nearly all the distinguishing features of the Orphic

¹ *Le Dieu de Platon* p. 177.

discipline were irreconcilable with the religion of Homer, such as the more or less explicit pantheism, the depreciation of the body in comparison with the soul, the shifting of the ethical centre of gravity from the present to the future world in consequence of a new conception of immortality, together with the sense of sin and the longing for purification and deliverance. In a soil already, as it would seem, prepared by Orphism, Pythagoras planted that remarkable union of philosophy and religion which we associate with his name. He was a native of Samos; but about 530 B.C., in consequence, perhaps, of the tyranny of Polycrates, he emigrated to Croton, where the Orphic discipline appears to have been by this time established. It is a plausible conjecture, if nothing more, that he attached himself in his adopted country to some Orphic association, which may thus have furnished the nucleus of his school.¹ However this may be, he became the founder of a half-religious, half-scientific brotherhood, which in course of time began to play a part in politics; and when it ultimately obtained the supreme direction of affairs, ruled in the aristocratic interest till overthrown by a revolution in the latter half of the fifth century. Although the original foundation was suppressed, Pythagoreanism still lived; and the dispersion of the surviving members of the Order effectually spread its principles not only through Southern Italy and Sicily, but also on the mainland of Greece.

Iamblichus and others have described with much detail the organisation of the early Pythagorean brotherhood, as well as the daily life of its members;² but for historical purposes their picturesque and circumstantial narratives are of little value. The tendency to idealise

¹ Ion of Chios said that Pythagoras manufactured some "Orphic" poems (Diog. Laert. viii. 8).

² See Iambl. *vit. Pyth.* 96-99.

both the founder of the society and the original foundation itself, called into existence a vast amount of fable and romance that almost entirely conceals from view the beginnings of Pythagoreanism in Greece. It is clear, however, that what Plato calls the "Pythagorean way of life"¹ bore a general resemblance to the Orphic, so far as concerned those rules of abstinence by which it was sought to facilitate the deliverance of the soul.² The few authenticated fragments that remain of primitive Pythagorean psychology belong to the same type. In the opinion of certain Pythagoreans, says Aristotle, the motes that we see dancing in the sunlight are souls:³ and elsewhere the philosopher complains that in the "Pythagorean myths" the connexion between a particular body and a particular soul is arbitrary and accidental: "any soul may enter any body."⁴ A third passage informs us that the object of thunder, according to the Pythagoreans, was to terrify those in hell.⁵ This curious bit of early Pythagorean eschatology seems to have suggested to Plato one of the incidents in the myth of Er—the bellowing of Tartarus whenever any of the incurable sinners expected to be allowed to pass out.⁶ It is manifest that all these isolated observations are in agreement, so far as they go, with Orphic views.⁷ On the strength of a passage in the *Phaedo*, where the Platonic Socrates refers to the "secret doctrine" that man has no right to unbolt the door of his prison-house by suicide,⁸ the early Pythagoreans are usually supposed to have shared the Orphic conception of the body as the dungeon of the soul; and Pythagoras is probably one of those primitive theologians who held that the soul is as it were buried in the body by reason of her

¹ *Rep.* x. 600 B.

² Details are given by Rohde, *Psyche*² ii. p. 163 ff.

³ *de An.* i. 2. 404^a 17 ff.

⁴ *de An.* i. 3. 407^b 20 ff.

⁵ *Anal. post.* ii. 11. 94^b 33 ff.

⁶ *Rep.* x. 615 E.

⁷ See p. 105 ff.

⁸ 62 B.

sins.¹ The doctrine of transmigration and the "circle of necessity" is one that may without doubt be ascribed to Pythagoras himself. The oldest and most picturesque piece of evidence to this effect is due to Xenophanes, for it is Pythagoras to whom he alludes in the satirical lines:

"Once he was moved to pity—so men say—
Seeing a dog rough-handled by the way.
'Forbear thy hand: housed in yon cur doth lie
A friend of mine: I knew him by his cry.'"²

Finally, as we have already seen, in the time of Eudemus, at all events, if not earlier, the Pythagoreans believed in the doctrine of the "restoration of all things," as it was afterwards understood by the Stoics.³

If this were all that could be affirmed of early Pythagoreanism, we should have to regard it as only an offshoot from the Orphic discipline and creed. But it is in the highest degree probable that the original Pythagorean society combined to a certain extent the love of knowledge with devotion to their founder's rule of life. The evidence of Heraclitus clearly points in this direction; for in his contemptuous allusion to Pythagoras he selects for special mention, not the religious enthusiasm of the prophet, but the learning of the philosopher (*πολυμαθία*).⁴ In all probability, as Döring has attempted to show,⁵ we should conceive of the matter in some such way as this. The great aim of the original Pythagorean brotherhood was identical with that of the Orphic communities—moral salvation or "release" (*λύσις*). But whereas the Orphics endeavoured to attain this object principally by means of abstinence and ceremonial rites, Pythagoras held that the pursuit of knowledge might also contribute to spiritual emancipa-

¹ See p. 98.

² *fr.* 7 Diels. Cf. Hdt. ii. 123, *fr.* 16, 17 Bywater. Cf. Emp. *fr.* 129, and Hdt. iv. 95.

and Diog. Laert. viii. 14.

³ See p. 109.

⁵ *Archiv f. Gesch. d. Phil.* v. p. 503 ff.

tion. At a later time, the power of *amor intellectualis* to transform the moral as well as the intellectual nature was fully recognised by Plato; it is, in fact, the main-spring of his educational theory. As time went on, the scientific energy thus engendered in the Pythagorean school grew stronger and stronger, until the original motive was in many cases lost sight of, and the desire for moral salvation insensibly became a quest for intellectual truth.

What then was the scientific doctrine of Pythagoras? A brief consideration of one or two points in Aristotle's account of Pythagorean physics may enable us to give at least a conjectural answer to the question. The Pythagoreans, Aristotle says, reared as they were on mathematical studies, imagined that the elements of mathematical existences are also the elements of the universe. Now the "naturally first" and simplest form of mathematical existence is number; and the elements of number are the odd and the even, whereof the former is "limited" and the latter "unlimited." On what grounds the Pythagoreans declared the odd to be limited and the even unlimited, we need not at present inquire:¹ it is enough for our purposes to note that having once arrived, apparently in this way, at the conception of Limit and the Unlimited, they proceeded to evolve the universe from these two principles. Their cosmology was therefore out and out dualistic; nor does Aristotle lend any support to the monistic interpretation of Pythagoreanism with which we meet in later writers. On the contrary, he expressly states that the Pythagoreans derived the world from opposites—*τὰναντία ἀρχαὶ τῶν ὄντων*.²

On the one hand, therefore, we have the principle of Limit, and on the other the principle of the Unlimited—

¹ See Zeller, *Phil. d. Griechen*⁵ i. ² *Met.* A 5. 985^b 23–986^b 3.
p. 351 n. 2.

πέρας and *ἄπειρον*. By what means are they brought into connexion with one another? Aristotle complains that the Pythagoreans threw no real light upon this subject. "They tell us nothing," he says, "about how Limit and the Unlimited, or the Odd and the Even, their only ultimate principles, are to be set in motion, or how, without motion and change, generation and destruction or the movements of the heavenly bodies can arise."¹ Elsewhere he informs us that in the Pythagorean cosmogony, "as soon as the Unit was composed . . . the nearest parts of the Unlimited immediately began to be drawn in and limited by Limit."² The Unit which Aristotle here mentions is probably to be identified with the central fire of the Universe, which according to the Pythagoreans was the first object to take shape in the evolution of the cosmos;³ but the point which alone concerns us is that, according to this passage, Limit appears to play the part of an active or formative principle, whereas the Unlimited, being merely attracted and defined by Limit, is something purely passive. We are to conceive, apparently, of an infinitely extended substance, on which, at a particular point of time, the principle of Limit, which is itself eternal like the other, begins to work, exactly how or why, the Pythagoreans did not attempt to explain. More and more of the Unlimited is gradually brought beneath the sway of Limit, and the cosmos is complete as soon as that particular portion of the Unlimited which is destined to form the world has been reduced into order. But the Unlimited, true to its name, still stretches to infinity outside the world; and the early Pythagoreans sometimes represented it as the air or breath which the Universe inhales.⁴ In this conception, the analogy between the

¹ *Met.* A 8. 990^a 8 ff.

² *Met.* N 3. 1091^a 15 ff.

³ Zeller *l.c.* p. 412.

⁴ *Arist. phys.* iii. 4. 203^a 7; *Aet. Plac.* ii. 9. 1 (Diels, *Dox.* p. 338).

Macrocosm and the Microcosm, which we already found in Anaximenes, is emphatically reaffirmed.¹

It is obvious that the Pythagorean principle of Limit, regarded as the creative agency which forms the universe out of the Unlimited, readily lends itself to a theological interpretation; but it was not interpreted in any such way till after the time of Aristotle. Later writers were in the habit of describing the fundamental antinomy as God and Matter, or Unity and the Indefinite Dyad. Thus in the *Placita* we are told that Pythagoras believed in two original principles, "the monad, God, or the Good, the essential nature of the One, *Nous* alone and by itself; and on the other hand the indefinite dyad, the Evil Spirit or Evil, with which is bound up materiality and multitude" (*τὸ ὑλικὸν πλῆθος*).² Others, it would seem, refusing to acquiesce in so rigid a dualism, postulated a higher unity from which the opposing principles were to be derived, and called it "the Supreme God" (*τὸν ὑπεράνω θεόν*).³ But all this, as I have said, is later than Aristotle, who invariably regards the Pythagoreans as thoroughgoing dualists.

Aristotle nowhere attributes the Pythagorean philosophy to Pythagoras; in this connexion he invariably speaks of "the Pythagoreans." But it is difficult to account for the pervading dualism of subsequent Pythagorean speculation unless we suppose that in some form or another Pythagoras was himself a dualist. Possibly, as has been conjectured, he was influenced by Anaximander's doctrine of the warfare of opposites after they have been separated out of the "Infinite."⁴ For us, however, the real importance of Pythagoras lies, not in his physical theory, if he ever possessed one, but rather in the new conception of philosophy which he introduced

¹ See p. 189.

² *Doz.* p. 302* 6 ff.

³ *Simplic. Phys.* 181. 10. ff. Diels
(Ritter and Preller² § 70).

⁴ See Burnet, *l.c.* p. 106, and
above, p. 188).

into the Greek world. His philosophical predecessors limited themselves to speculations about nature, without, so far as we can see, attempting in any way to regulate the lives of men. Pythagoras, on the other hand, not only made philosophy into a way of life, but established a brotherhood to be the living embodiment of his principles, known and read of all men. Whether he gave his sanction to the political activity of his followers or not, we cannot tell. If he did, we must suppose that he claimed for philosophy the right to determine the policy of the State as well as the conduct of the individual; but in any case the rule of the Pythagorean brotherhood in Croton is the earliest instance in Greek history of that union between philosophy and politics which Plato afterwards declared to be the only hope of salvation for the world. The truth is that philosophy, as interpreted by Pythagoras, exercised many of the functions which we are in the habit of ascribing to religion; and the Pythagorean brotherhood should therefore be regarded as a kind of quasi-religious community or church. It is only from this point of view that we can understand the veneration in which the name of Pythagoras was held among his followers. In a specimen of Pythagorean classification which Iamblichus quotes from Aristotle, it is said that the genus "rational animal" contains three varieties, Gods, men, and the likes of Pythagoras.¹ Later writers describe Pythagoras as of divine origin, the son of Apollo, or even the Hyperborean Apollo himself, and attribute to him diverse prophetic and miraculous powers, all of which are easily intelligible if we realise that to his disciples he was the inspired and half-divine exponent of a new religion, and not merely the discoverer of new truths about the origin and constitution of the world.

I have next to invite your attention to one of the

¹ *vit. Pyth.* 31 (Diels² i. p. 24).

most interesting, though not one of the greatest, figures in early Greek philosophy, Xenophanes of Colophon. Xenophanes is the first Greek philosopher of whose personality we are able to form a distinct and vivid impression. Born about 570 B.C., in the Ionian colony of Colophon in Asia Minor, he appears to have remained in Asia until the subjugation of the Greek colonies by Persia in 545. Thereupon he went to Sicily; and finally, as it would seem, after diverse wanderings through Greece, in the course of which he supported himself by reciting his own poems,¹ he settled in the Phocaean colony of Elea in Italy, where he became the founder of the Eleatic school of thought.² He lived to an advanced age; one account makes him more than a hundred years old when he died.³

In a famous autobiographical fragment Xenophanes seems to imply that he had published at the age of twenty-five a work which afterwards became well known throughout Greece: "by this time" (he says) "my thoughts have been circulating up and down the land of Hellas for threescore years and seven; and then there were five and twenty years from my birth, if I know how to speak truly on the matter." If this is what the fragment means, we can hardly be wrong in supposing that the work in question was an attack on the theology of Homer and Hesiod. It has been suggested that the luxurious self-indulgence of his Ionian fellow-citizens, and the readiness with which they and most of the neighbouring Greek colonies submitted to the Persian yoke, led Xenophanes to scrutinise the religious and moral foundations of Greek life, and that the iconoclastic spirit thus engendered grew stronger and more intense as he learnt

¹ Diog. Laert. ix. 18.

² Zeller, *l.c.* pp. 522, 554 *nn.*

³ Diels² i. p. 35, § 7.

⁴ *fr.* 8. The word *φροντίδα* refers, I think, as Bergk imagined, to

some literary work. Cf. with the fragment in general Theog. 19-22 and esp. 247 (*καθ' Ἑλλάδα γῆν στροφόμενος ἡδ' ἀνὰ νῆσους*).

more of contemporary standards and ideals in the course of his peregrinations through Greece.¹ The suggestion is interesting, and may be right; but whatever inspired his iconoclasm, no reader of the fragments will question its sincerity and depth. Nor is it only Homer upon whom the lash of his invective falls. He is hardly less severe upon his own Asiatic fellow-citizens, who go to the market-place "in garments of purple, proud at heart, glorying in their fair locks, reeking with exquisite perfumes";² and he protests against the popular preference of athletic to intellectual prowess, in words that strangely anticipate the claim of Socrates to be supported at the public expense on the ground that he is infinitely more useful to the State than any prizeman of Olympia.³ Xenophanes does not, indeed, like Heraclitus, stand aloof from life and fulminate at human folly from the mountain-tops of thought; but his prevailing attitude is nevertheless one of protest and opposition; and that he should have escaped persecution throughout so long a life, is an eloquent testimony to the simple and unaffected nobility of the man, as well as to the toleration of his contemporaries.

It is difficult to estimate how far Xenophanes was affected by the Orphic movement which we have already discussed. His theological doctrine presents some remarkable points of affinity with Orphic pantheism, as Freudenthal has pointed out.⁴ The Orphic conception of Zeus as the Divine Unity, in whom all things exist, bears an obvious resemblance to Xenophanes' "one God," who is the All.⁵ But although Orphism doubtless paved the way for Xenophanes' teaching, and more especially for his revolt against the authority of Homer, there is the less reason to suppose that he derived his theology from

¹ Gomperz, *Greek Thinkers* i. p. 157 f.

² *fr.* 3.

³ *fr.* 2. Cf. Plato, *Ap.* 36 B ff.

⁴ *Über die Theologie des Xenophanes* (1886) p. 29.

⁵ See p. 95.

this source, because in other respects he manifests no sympathy with Orphic and Pythagorean ideas. We have seen that he poured contempt upon Pythagoras for believing in metempsychosis; and he is said also to have fallen foul of Epimenides, one of the greatest among the precursors of the Orphic purifying priests.¹ Orphic asceticism could hardly have appealed to the genial writer who in his classic picture of a well-ordered banquet bids the guests praise God "with pious tales and pure words," and then drink as much as they can carry home without a guide—"unless," he considerably adds, "you are very old."²

Xenophanes is the earliest Greek philosopher of whose works a sufficient number of fragments remain to enable us to ascertain his opinions at first hand. I will begin by putting before you the principal fragments about the being and attributes of God, and afterwards proceed to discuss the doctrine which they seem to express.

"Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the Gods everything that is a shame and reproach among men, theft and adultery and mutual deception."³

"For they"—Homer and Hesiod—"recounted many lawless deeds of Gods, theft and adultery and mutual deception."⁴

"But mortals think that Gods are begotten, and have dress and voice and form like their own."⁵

"But if oxen or lions had hands and could draw with their hands and make works of art as men do, horses would draw forms of Gods like horses, and oxen like oxen, giving them bodies after the fashion of their own."⁶

"The Ethiopians represent their Gods as flat-nosed and black; the Thracians say theirs have blue eyes and red hair."⁷

These are the polemical or destructive fragments: now let us take the constructive.

¹ Diog. Laert. ix. 18.

² *fr.* 1. 5 f.

³ *fr.* 11.

⁴ *fr.* 12.

⁵ *fr.* 14.

⁶ *fr.* 15.

⁷ *fr.* 16.

"One God, greatest among both Gods and men, resembling mortals neither in form nor in thought."¹

"He"—i.e. God—"is all eye, all thought, all hearing" (*ὄλος ὁρᾷ, ὄλος δὲ νοεῖ, ὄλος δὲ τ' ἀκούει*).²

"Evermore doth he abide in the same place, moving not at all; nor doth it beseech him to go about now this way and now that."³

"But without toil he rules all things by the purpose of his mind."⁴

Let us now examine the most important doctrines affirmed or apparently implied in these fragments.

1. "One God, greatest among Gods and men." Is this a profession of monotheism? } So the line was understood by Clement of Alexandria,⁵ to whom we owe the fragment; and so it has been interpreted by nearly every scholar till within the last twenty years. In 1886, however, a powerful attack upon the traditional view was made by Freudenthal, in the monograph to which I have already referred; and although he failed to convince Zeller or Diels, he has found a strong supporter in one of the greatest of modern scholars, Theodor Gomperz. Gomperz maintains that "the alleged monotheism of Xenophanes is at once and finally confuted by the single verse *εἰς θεὸς ἔν τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνθρώποισι μέγιστος*,"⁶ which he thus translates, not (as it appears to me) quite accurately: "Ein Gott ist der grösste, so unter Göttern als Menschen."⁷ The presence of the plural *θεοῖσι* in the very line which is supposed to affirm the unity of God proves (he thinks) the supposition false. "We much prefer," says Gomperz, "to recognize the reference here to a supreme god who is hardly less superior to

¹ fr. 23.

² fr. 24.

³ fr. 26.

⁴ fr. 25 (reading *κρατύνει* with Freudenthal. Cf. *Orph. hymn.* 3. 11; 64. 8).

⁵ *Strom.* v. p. 714.

⁶ *Greek Thinkers* i. p. 551.

⁷ P. 130 of the German edition. The English translation has: "there

is a greatest god among gods as well as among men" (*l.c.* p. 158). This rendering entirely ignores *εἰς*. Gomperz translates the *εἰς*, but seems to me wrong in construing *εἰς θεὸς ἔστι μέγιστος κτλ.*, and not *εἰς <ἔστι> θεός, μέγιστος κτλ.* The latter, I think, is the proper construction of Xenophanes' words.

the lower gods than to mankind.”¹ On this interpretation, Xenophanes becomes, not a monotheist, but a “henotheist”—that is, according to Freudenthal’s use of the word, a believer in many Gods, depending on a single highest God, who is consequently apt to be regarded simply as the Godhead.²

The question thus raised is clearly of importance for our investigation. In the fragments of Xenophanes, we find the name *θεός* three times in the singular number,³ besides three other passages in which it is the subject to be supplied to a singular verb,⁴ making six places in all which *prima facie* support the unity of God. Two of these six instances have to be discounted as belonging to a category in which Greek linguistic usage permits either the singular or the plural.⁵ There remain, in addition to the fragment beginning *εἰς θεός*, etc., these three cases: “he is all eye, all thought, all hearing,” “evermore doth he abide in the same place, moving not at all, nor doth it beseem him to go now this way and now that,” and “without toil he directs all things by the purpose of his mind.” You will observe that each of these statements, like so much besides that Xenophanes wrote, is deliberately aimed at the Homeric theology. Homer’s Gods frequently fall short of the omniscience which theoretically belongs to them; they are not entirely exempt from toil and suffering; they are far from being immovable or unchangeable; nor do they abide in one locality, but constantly pass to and fro from heaven to earth, and “in the likeness of strangers from far countries, put on all manner of shapes, and wander through the cities, beholding the violence and the righteousness of men.”⁶ In like manner, we are bound, I think, to interpret the expression about the “one God” by the

¹ p. 551.

² Freudenthal, *l.c.* p. 33 n. 2.

³ 1. 13; 23. 1; 38. 1.

⁴ 24. 1; 25. 1; 26. 1, 2.

⁵ 1. 13; 38. 1.

⁶ *Od.* 17. 485 ff., tr. B. and L.

light of the theology which Xenophanes would fain demolish, especially as in the very next line—"neither in body nor in mind resembling man"—he definitely attacks the second great feature of the Homeric religion, namely, anthropomorphism.)

Now according to Gomperz' explanation of the line, there is no real difference between Homer and Xenophanes as far as concerns the position of the supreme God. Homer would be the first to agree that there is "a greatest God among gods as well as men": the phrase, indeed, exactly describes the Homeric Zeus. What he never would or could admit is the existence of only one God, greatest in heaven and in earth. And if we have regard to linguistic considerations, we cannot but feel that *εἷς* and not *μέγιστος* is the really emphatic word. The metrical ictus combines with the sentence-accent to force the unity of God upon the reader's attention; and with good reason, for it is here that Homer profoundly disagrees.) Just as the Jews in their daily repetition of the words, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord," laid stress, according to Professor Sanday, on "one" to "mark the contrast to the gods of the heathen,"¹ so in *εἷς θεὸς ἔν τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνθρώποισι μέγιστος*, Xenophanes must have intended the stress to fall on *εἷς*, so as to emphasise the difference between his own conception of the Godhead and that of Homer. How then are we to explain the phrase "greatest among Gods as well as men"? I have already anticipated the most reasonable answer by describing the God of Xenophanes as "greatest in heaven and in earth." The words are "a popular expression of the idea that God is the absolutely greatest";² nowhere in all the universe is there any like unto him. They are only a petrified formula or idiom, to which the defenders of the view I

¹ Art. "God" in Hastings' *Dict. of the Bible* ii. p. 206.

² Zeller, *l.c.* p. 530.

advocate have collected a number of parallels from Homer and other Greek writers.¹ We cannot assign a distributive value to the expression without imputing to Xenophanes the insipid statement that there is a God who is "greatest among men." To suppose that Xenophanes believed in a plurality of Gods merely because he uses such a phrase, would be hardly less absurd than to accuse a man of polytheism in the present day when he invokes his Maker as "God of Gods, and Lord of Lords."²

For these reasons I believe that Xenophanes definitely intended to affirm the unity of God in opposition to the Homeric polytheism. Some confirmatory evidence has been found in a remarkable statement preserved by Eusebius, the ultimate source of which is Theophrastus' work "On the Opinions of the Natural Philosophers." "Xenophanes declared that there is no hegemony among the Gods; for it is unholy to suppose that any of them is subject to a master; and no God has need of anything at all."³ That the statement is authoritative, no one, so far as I know, denies; and we may note in passing that it cannot be reconciled with Freudenthal's "henotheistic" interpretation of Xenophanes. The "one *greatest* God" must surely exercise dominion over all the other Gods. But in point of fact, as Zeller has shown,⁴ Xenophanes' denial of a hegemony in the celestial commonwealth is tantamount to a denial of polytheism altogether; for a multitude of wholly independent Gods without any degrees of rank would have been inconceivable to the Greek mind. It is incredible that Xenophanes of all men should have discarded the only element of order which we meet with in Greek polytheism.

There are, however, other passages in which the philosopher mentions a plurality of Gods. Sometimes,

¹ Zeller, *l.c.n.* 3. Cf. Diels, *poet. phil.* Gr. p. 42.

² Zeller, *l.c.* p. 532 n. 1.

³ Diels, *Dox.* p. 580. 14 ff.; cf.

Zeller, *l.c.* p. 526 f. Euripides echoes the sentiment in *II. F.* 1341 ff.

⁴ *l.c.*

of course, he is referring merely to the Gods of Homer, Hesiod, and the *profanum vulgus*,¹ against whose theology he protests; but three of the examples are of a different kind. "It is good to fear the Gods alway"; "not all things have the Gods revealed to mortals at the beginning"²—this is manifestly the language of polytheism. How are we to reconcile such language with the monotheistic doctrine which the philosopher elsewhere professes? Perhaps the third and last of this type of passages may suggest an answer. "There never was, and never shall be, any man, who has sure and certain *Knowledge* concerning what I say about Gods and all things; for however much he may hit the mark by accident, yet he himself has no *Knowledge*; but *Opinion* presides over all things."³ In this difficult and much-debated fragment two points are in my judgment clear. One is that Knowledge and Opinion are opposed; the other, that whatever Xenophanes has said "about the Gods and all things" is declared by him to be matter of Opinion and not Knowledge. No one, he says, and the statement must apply to himself as well as to others, ever will have knowledge on these questions; only opinion, and nothing more. Turn now for a moment to Parmenides, who was regarded in antiquity as the pupil of Xenophanes.⁴ The same opposition between Knowledge and Opinion divides the philosophy of Parmenides into two sharply contrasted and mutually antagonistic parts. "It is necessary," he says, "that thou shouldest learn all, both the unshaken heart of persuasive Truth, and the opinions of mortal men, wherein is no sure belief";⁵ and thereafter he proceeds to unfold in the first place his philosophy of Truth, and afterwards his philosophy of Opinion in what he calls a "deceitful array

¹ 11. 1; 12. 1; 14. 1; 15. 4.

² 1. 24; 18. 1.

³ *fr.* 34. With ἐπὶ πᾶσι τέτυκται, cf. *Pl. Rep.* 511 E, 534 A.

⁴ See Diels² i. p. 107, § 6.

⁵ *fr.* 1. 28 ff. (reading εὐπειθές).

of verses."¹ Parmenides' philosophy of Truth substitutes for the theological unity of Xenophanes a metaphysical unity, that of Being, in which polytheism and monotheism are alike excluded; his philosophy of Opinion, which he himself pronounces to be deceptive, offers a physical explanation of the origin of the world, in the course of which Parmenides spoke of a plurality of Gods.² Now it so happens that Xenophanes has also a physical theory, according to which everything that exists originated from two material elements, earth and water. "*All things come from earth and all things pass into earth.*" "*All things that come to birth and grow are earth and water.*" "*For we have all sprung from earth and water.*"³ This theory cannot be reconciled with Xenophanes' belief in a single unchangeable God any more than the physical hypothesis of Parmenides can be reconciled with his metaphysical concept of Being; and it is clear that to Xenophanes also his physical speculations were only "Opinion" and not "Knowledge." When he says that opinion alone is possible about his theory of "all things," I believe the reference is to his physical theory that "*all things which come to birth and grow are earth and water.*" His statements on this subject, as we may infer from another line, are only "opinions resembling the truth."⁴ And similarly, when he declares that what he says about Gods—that is, about a *plurality* of Gods, for the plural is significant—cannot be known, but only opined, I think he indicates that polytheism is no part of his Theology of Truth, any more than the polytheism of Parmenides' "lying verses" belongs to his Philosophy of Truth. We conclude, therefore, that Xenophanes' "true theology" is contained in his description of the "one God," who "neither in body nor in mind resembles man"; and that when he uses polytheistic language, he

¹ *fr.* 8. 52.² *fr.* 13.³ *fr.* 27, 29, 33.⁴ *fr.* 35.

is speaking from the standpoint, not of Knowledge, but of Opinion.

2. The second theological doctrine implied in the fragments of Xenophanes is that God is uncreated. We may fairly draw this inference from the line in which he ridicules his countrymen for believing in begotten Gods. Aristotle has preserved an *obiter dictum* of the philosopher to the same effect. "Those who attribute birth to the Gods are not less impious than those who say they die; for it follows in either case that at some time or other the Gods are not."¹ Xenophanes completes as it were the already half-drawn circle of the eternity of the Godhead, repudiating by implication all those primitive theogonies, whether *Hesiodic* or *Orphic*, that filled so large a space in the theological literature of Greece, together with the unedifying legends they contained—stories of cannibalism, mutilation, and theomachies of every kind: all such relics of primeval superstition are proscribed by Xenophanes, when he denies that Gods are born. They are only "figments of the men of old" (*πλάσματα τῶν προτέρων*).²

3. The third point to be observed is that Xenophanes implicitly affirms the morality and truthfulness of God. He reprobates Homer and Hesiod for ascribing to the Gods whatever is a shame and reproach among men, "theft and adultery and mutual deception." In specifying theft, he thinks, no doubt, of Hermes, the patron-God of stealing and forswearing,³ himself, as depicted in the Homeric Hymn, a God "of many a quirk, wily in counsel, a robber, a cattle-driver, a captain of thieves, a night-watcher, a lurker by the gates."⁴ The second count in Xenophanes' indictment might be freely illustrated from Epic poetry; and of the third we have a

¹ *Rhet.* ii. 23. 1399^b 6 ff.; cf. 1400^b 5 ff.

² 1. 22.

³ *Od.* 19. 396.

⁴ 13 ff. (reading *ἡγήτορα φαρῶν*).

notorious example in the *Διὸς ἀπάτη*, the beguiling of Zeus by Hera.¹ Whatever the original intention of this story may have been, there can be little doubt that it had a literal and not a symbolical meaning to the majority of Homer's readers in the time of Xenophanes. But the principle which underlies Xenophanes' censure is more important than the censure itself. He clearly takes it for granted that the character and conduct of the Deity should be such as to furnish an ethical standard to mankind. "It is unnatural and wrong," he seems to say, "that the Gods should be morally inferior to ourselves; they ought to surpass us in virtue as much as they excel us in power; and by following their example, we should merit the praise, and not the reproaches of our fellow-men." Xenophanes is, I believe, the earliest Greek writer who demands that the Gods shall teach by example, and not merely by precept.²

4. The fourth proposition which Xenophanes makes about God is that he "neither in body nor in mind resembles man." It is clear from this and other fragments that Xenophanes entirely rejected all anthropopathic as well as anthropomorphic representations of the divine nature.

It is unnecessary to dwell upon the revolutionary character of such a protest. To a Greek it would have seemed, I think, at least as revolutionary as the monotheistic doctrine we have seen reason to ascribe to the philosopher. If we fully realise the extent to which in this respect Xenophanes must have violated the religious sentiment of his countrymen, we shall be less disposed to question the traditional view that he was a believer in the unity of God.

5. The positive counterpart of Xenophanes' negation of

¹ *Il.* 14. 294 ff.

² See p. 65. For the significance of this demand in the develop-

ment of religion, consult Tiele, *Elements of the Science of Religion* i. p. 105 ff.

anthropomorphism is contained in the last three fragments. "He is all eye, all thought, all hearing": "evermore doth he abide in the same place, moving not at all; nor doth it beseem him to go now this way and now that"; "but without toil he directs all things by the purpose of his mind." Taken in their full and literal meaning, the words of the philosopher imply that God is extended in space; he abides, we are told, immovably in one spot, hearing, seeing, and thinking throughout all his frame, instead of moving hither and thither and having his cognitive and perceptive faculties restricted to special organs, as is the case with man. The doxographical tradition adds some fresh points which enable us to define Xenophanes' conception more precisely. We are told by Hippolytus that according to Xenophanes, "God is eternal, and one, and alike in every direction, and finite and spherical, and percipient in all his parts";¹ and in Diogenes Laertius we have this account: "The being of God is spherical, and bears no resemblance to man: he sees all over and hears all over, *but does not respire*."² The majority of scholars are agreed that Xenophanes is here expressing dissent from the Pythagorean doctrine that the Universe is always inhaling and exhaling the infinite breath or void which surrounds it on every side.³ It follows that Xenophanes' "one God, greatest in heaven and in earth," is just the world in which we live. As Aristotle puts it, he turned his eyes upon the Universe, and said, "The one is God."⁴

To Xenophanes, the World is therefore a visible, incarnate God, beside whom there is none other. Did he conceive of this God as a personal being?

Whatever personality may be, it is not synonymous with anthropomorphism; and we must beware of supposing that Xenophanes denied the personality of God

¹ *Dox.* p. 565. 25 ff.

² *ix.* 19.

³ See p. 195.

⁴ *Met.* A 5. 986^b 24.

simply because he rejected the anthropomorphic elements of the popular religion. There are many expressions in his poems which appear to attribute personality to the World-God. Even when he is combating the theology of Homer, Xenophanes never speaks of God as a philosophical abstraction, like the "Being" of Parmenides, but as a living person, in the fullest sense of the word, possessed of a body as well as a soul, seeing, hearing, thinking, and directing all things by the purpose of his mind. In the face of such language, which might well have exposed the philosopher to the very charge of anthropomorphism which he brought against the poets, it seems to me hazardous to deny that his one and only God was to Xenophanes a personal God, in whatever light he may appear to us. The truth is that the tendency to personify the manifold forces of nature was so deeply ingrained, in the Hellenic temperament, that we need not be surprised if Xenophanes connected the idea of personality with that concept of a single all-embracing, all-controlling Power in which he appears to have found the true and essential unity of things. For just as Greek polytheism was, in part at least, a deification of natural forces, so the monotheism of Xenophanes is in effect a deification of Nature. God is to him the

"End, and beginning of each thing that growes ;
Whose selfe no end, nor yet beginning knowes ;
That hath no eyes to see, nor ears to heare ;
Yet sees, and heares, and is all-eye, all-eare."¹

Xenophanes anticipates to a certain limited extent the curiously personal kind of pantheism which we afterwards meet with in the hymn of Cleanthes; and this, together with his polemic against Greek polytheism, constitutes his chief claim to be regarded as a religious teacher of the Greeks. His poems contain little or

¹ Giles Fletcher (quoted by Harrison, *Platonism in English Poetry* p. 102).

nothing about the relation of God to man. The efficacy of divination, it is said, he totally denied: *divinationem funditus sustulit*.¹ As to prayer, we find nothing in his philosophical fragments; but in the *Banquet*, he makes a suggestion about the proper objects of prayer which is unlike anything in Greek literature before his time. We should pray, Xenophanes says, not, as we may suppose the antithesis to be, for worldly honours and prosperity, but merely for "power to do that which is right."² The note which Xenophanes here strikes is often heard in the religious teaching of Socrates and Plato. Finally, we owe to Xenophanes a sentiment which in its special application to religious history unconsciously foreshadows the conception of a gradual or progressive revelation, through which man's continual searching after God will be rewarded by a deeper knowledge of his attributes and person. "Not all things have the Gods revealed to mortals at the first; but in course of time by searching men find out a better way."³

¹ Cic. *de Div.* i. 5.

² *fr.* 18.

³ l. 15 f.