XENOPHANES, THE GODS, AND THE REINVENTION OF POETIC AUTHORITY

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ABSTRACT
DEREK SMITH: Xenophanes, the Gods, and the Reinvention of Poetic Authority
(Under the direction of Peter Smith)

This thesis explores the nature and authority of the theological comments made by Xenophanes of Colophon. In my first chapter I discuss the critical and positive fragments of Xenophanes’ work and attempt to both construct a consistent theological account and discover the methods by which he arrives at his conclusions. After adopting James Lesher’s position that Xenophanes is rejecting the possibility of divine communication, I explore the consequences of this radical pronouncement in my second chapter: if Xenophanes, unlike his poetic predecessors, does not have access to the gods through divine inspiration, how can he speak authoritatively about divine matters? In this chapter I begin by discussing the gods, truth, and authority in the works of Homer and Hesiod before analyzing these concepts in the fragments of Xenophanes. In my third chapter I attempt to pinpoint the significance of Xenophanes’ position by comparing his thoughts with those of two (roughly) contemporary poets, Parmenides and Pindar.
To my mother who never stops calling.
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INTRODUCTION

The poems of Xenophanes of Colophon, most of which remain in fragmentary form, are provocative and frustratingly obscure. He touches upon a variety of topics – including political advice, natural philosophy, theology, and epistemology – but often the context, source, and precise meaning of his ideas are unclear. The doxographical testimonia frequently further confuse matters by conflating the ideas of Xenophanes with those of later thinkers such as Parmenides and the Sceptics. Perhaps the most intriguing feature of Xenophanes’ work is his claim that there is “one god, greatest among gods and men” (B23). What precisely is this god and from where does Xenophanes derive this belief?

I will begin this project in my first chapter by exploring this question. I will look at both the critical fragments (B10-B17), in which Xenophanes attacks the traditional conventions found in epic poetry and popular religion, and the constructive ones (B23-B26), in which he postulates the existence of one supreme god who remains stationary and moves all by the “mind of his mind” (νόου φρήν, B 25). I will argue that his rejection of the anthropomorphic representations of the gods found in poetry and religious images serves as the foundation for his abstract and unified conception of the divine. Moreover, his comments on the limitation of human knowledge in B18 and B34-B35 add another dimension to his attacks on traditional religion: the gods have not communicated directly

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1 I will reference every fragment of Xenophanes’ own work by using the Diels-Kranz arrangement: B followed by the number of the fragment; for testimonial fragments I will in most cases provide both the Diels-Kranz designation (A followed by the number) as well as the location within the text itself.
with mortals and so humans must rely on the superior, albeit limited, methods of inquiry and autopsy. Xenophanes’ thoughts on the divine are tentative: they approximate true things (ἐοικότα τοῖς ἔτυμοις, B35) but the clear truth (τὸ σαφές, B34) about the gods is beyond the reach of human knowledge. The focus of this thesis will then shift to the question of Xenophanes’ authority: if he rejects the possibility of communication between gods and humans, including the poetic inspiration from the Muses that Homer and Hesiod claim to have possessed, what does he offer to his audience that will persuade them to adopt his religious views over those of his allegedly inspired predecessors?

In order to answer this question, I will begin my second chapter with an examination of the works of Homer and Hesiod. I will first explore the complex and overlapping relationship between gods and humans found in poems of Homer before discussing the privileged status and authority of the bard. Homer not only invokes the Muses at appropriate moments, using their authority to vouch for his accuracy, but also uses the figure of Demodicus to favorably compare the account of a divinely inspired bard with the experience of Odysseus who was actually present at the events described in the bard’s song (Od. 487-491). The conception of poetic truth is quite nuanced: although the phrase κατὰ κόσμον is used by Odysseus as an indication of the accuracy of Demodicus’ song, the term κόσμος (Homer does not use ἀληθεία or related terms in reference to poetry) also bears connotations of aesthetic beauty and social propriety. In Hesiod’s Theogony the Muses themselves confront the poet and explain that they are quite willing to speak plausible falsehoods as well as truth (26-28). The personal element of Hesiod’s work is an important feature of his authority; the poet can draw teachings from his own life as well as from the Muses. Finally I will discuss the world of

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2 Pratt 1993, 22
Xenophanes and the manner in which he revises and reinvents poetic authority. While his work includes the scientific and demythologizing tendencies of Ionian philosophical thinkers, he also explicitly situates his work within the genre of Greek poems (ἀοιδάων ἦι γένος Ἑλλαδικῶν, B6) and incorporates traditional poetic elements such as epic diction, the emphasis on seemliness, and a poetic persona. His conception of truth (τὸ σαφές, B34) depends on autopsy and personal experience; although these are privileged in the contemporary inquiry-based methods of Ionian thinkers, Homer also champions sense perception as a sure source of knowledge. There is a consistent balance in the work of Xenophanes between contemporary intellectual approaches and the traditional features in which he couches his innovative ideas. His authority is not based on inspiration or any other form of divine communication, but rather he uses traditional and new approaches to establish the worth of his observations.

The final chapter of my thesis will attempt to locate the innovations of Xenophanes by comparing his thoughts on the gods, truth, and authority with those of the (roughly) contemporary poets Parmenides and Pindar. The former is the alleged pupil of Xenophanes and like him adopts the language and images of epic poetry to express his own radical ideas on the nature of the gods and the universe. The latter poet consistently adopts a piously religious attitude in his poetry and shows interest in revising mythical accounts of gods and heroes found in Homer and other poetic predecessors. While these two authors reveal strikingly different purposes for their poems, they both confront and revise the traditional depictions of the gods and the universe found in epic tradition. Xenophanes’ conception of truth and the gods is more radical than Pindar’s pious revisions of earlier accounts, though not quite as radical as Parmenides’ abstract and
logical system for determining the truth that, unlike Xenophanes’ emphasis on autopsy, has no precedent in the epic tradition. Nevertheless, Xenophanes differs from these two poets by his refusal to claim divine inspiration or communication as the source of his knowledge or authority.

The conclusions of this thesis are relevant for all those interested in the movement from a mythological understanding of the world to a logical one in ancient Greek literature. The gap between these two modes of thought is seen clearly in the works of Plato, who draws a sharp distinction between poetry and philosophy. Despite this view, authors who wrote in the centuries preceding the time of Plato did not see poetry and philosophy as mutually exclusive modes of expression. Writers such as Solon, Parmenides, and Empedocles use poetic language and images to express ideas that are frequently categorized as philosophical. Xenophanes is a particularly significant figure during the development of Greek thought in this period. Although his conception of the divine is predicated on a firm rejection of his poetic predecessors and contemporary religious customs, he nonetheless includes a number of traditional features in his poetry. For Xenophanes the poetic medium provided an ideal avenue for expressing innovative ideas to a general audience through language, themes, and values already familiar to them.

3 παλαιὰ μὲν τις διαφορὰ φιλοσοφία τε καὶ ποιητική (Rep. 607b5-6).
The nature and origin of Xenophanes’ conception of the gods are fraught with uncertainty and critical disagreement. Although there are a number of extant fragments that expound on a divine entity whose powers extend far beyond those of the gods found in his poetic predecessors, it is unclear how exactly this god fits into Xenophanes’ cosmological scheme and from where he derived the concept. Scholars have offered a variety of interpretations of his theological program: monotheism, refined polytheism, and pantheism have all been attributed to Xenophanes, although some have conceded that these distinctions are anachronistic and not necessarily mutually exclusive.\(^4\) The methods and approaches by which Xenophanes arrived at his pronouncements about the divine are equally under contention. While the fragments themselves suggest that he possessed an inductive mind, steeped in the tradition of Ionian autopsy and enquiry found in many of his philosophical predecessors, the later testimonial writers such as Simplicius and the author of *De Melisso Xenophane Gorgia* present Xenophanes as an abstract thinker who eschewed sense perception and relied rather on logical inference and deductive logic, as did his alleged pupil Parmenides. This chapter will explore the nature of Xenophanes’ conception of the divine and attempt to pinpoint the basis for his innovative comments.

The fragments in which Xenophanes discusses the gods explicitly can be separated into two distinct groups: the critical fragments (B10-B17) contain attacks against the depictions of the gods in poetry and popular religion, the constructive

\(^4\) E.g. Voegelin 1957, 179; Guthrie 1971, 1.375.
fragments (B23-B6) posit a unified conception of the divine radically different from the gods in popular and poetic representations. I will first examine the critical fragments in order to isolate key features of the gods that Xenophanes wishes to reject and revise; by indicating what the gods are not, Xenophanes is implying what his god is. The two most prominent criticisms are his attacks against the attribution of immoral behavior to the gods and the anthropomorphic representations of them. It is from these critiques that we can see the significance of moral purity and of a distinct divine nature for Xenophanes’ views on the gods.

The Critical Fragments (B10-B17)

The poetry of Homer and Hesiod was an authoritative source on the nature of gods and the universe, for better or worse. As Adeimantus observes in Plato’s Republic:

“If (the gods) do exist and do concern themselves with us, we’ve learned all we know about them from the laws and from the poets who give their genealogies - nowhere else” (365e1-3, trans. Grube). Xenophanes made a similar observation before Plato about the extent of their influence: έξ ἀρχῆς καθ Ὅμηρον ἐπεὶ μεμαθήκασι πάντες (B10).

Moreover, these poetic representations of the gods are as noxious as they are pervasive, inasmuch as Homer and Hesiod depict the gods as behaving immorally. Xenophanes notes:

πάντα Ἡσιόδος τε, ὅσα παρ’ ἀνθρώπων ὑνείδεα καὶ ψόγος ἐστίν, κλέπτειν μοιχεύειν τε καὶ ἀλλήλους ἀπατεύειν (B11).

The behavior of the gods in epic poetry is not consistent with the moral standards of human society. As Xenophanes notes, Homer and Hesiod do not hesitate to depict the
gods as engaged in adultery,⁵ theft,⁶ deception,⁷ and other actions that are characteristic of criminal behavior. It seems distasteful to Xenophanes that the gods, who are the objects of worship for men, should act in ways scorned in everyday life.

The epic “attribution” (ἀνέθηκαν) of these crimes is a perversion of the dedication (ἀνάθημα) that pious men should offer to the gods. In the elegiac B1, Xenophanes begins by detailing the necessity for purity (καθαρόν, 1, 8) of the culinary instruments and setting during a feast; the cleanliness of the physical properties, however, must be matched by the purity of what is said during the feast (καθαροῖσι λόγοι, 14). The description of battles and conflict (μάχας...στάσιας σφεδανάς, 21-23) among the gods, titans, giants, and centaurs – events often detailed in epic poetry - are to be omitted as fictions (πλάσματα, 22) of former poets. These violent struggles offer nothing useful (χρηστόν, 23), whereas the man who reveals good things (ἔσθλα ἀναφαίνει, 19) deserves praise for his memory (μνημοσύνη, 20), consideration (προμηθείην, 24), and striving for virtue (τόνος ἀμφ ἀρετῆς, 20). The concept of ἀρετή is removed from its etymological connection with Ares and martial valor; instead, the good and the useful are associated with purity, and thoughtful reverence and expression. The Xenophanean concept of divine purity, therefore, dictates that the gods avoid not only the sort of immoral activity that would incur blame among humans but also the violent and warlike behavior that often won praise among both gods and men.⁸

⁵ Cf. Ares and Aphrodite (Od. 8.266-366).
⁶ Cf. Hermes’ theft of Apollo’s cattle in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes 68-78.
⁷ Cf. the recurrence of deception in the succession of the chief gods in Th. 154-210, 453-506. Zeus, in fact, maintains his authority by deceiving (ἐξαπατήσας) and swallowing Metis (889).
While Xenophanes’ attacks on the poetic representations of the gods focus on the unethical conduct found among them, his criticisms of popular religious thought and practice concentrate on the widespread anthropomorphism underlying most forms of divine understanding and representation. He notes:

ἀλλ’ οἱ βροτοὶ δοκέουσι γεννᾶσθαι θεούς, τὴν σφετέρην δ’ ἐσθῆτα ἔχειν φωνήν τε δέμας τε (B14).

Men assume gods have human attributes such as “their own” (σφετέρην) clothing, voice, and body, and moreover gods are presented as being born (γεννᾶσθαι). The precise meaning of “their own” here is ambiguous; is the reflexive possessive pronoun referring to the subject of the main verb (δοκέουσι), the men (i.e. that gods are depicted as having physical characteristics like the men who believe in them) or to the subject of the infinitive (ἔχειν), the gods themselves (i.e. that the gods have their own particular physical characteristics). Lesher opts for the latter, suggesting that the grammar does not privilege the first reading and notes: “It was a feature of Greek popular religion that the gods were thought to make themselves manifest to men through certain distinctive traits. These included exceptional beauty, unblinking eyes, a special fragrance, as well as special clothing, voices, and exceptional stature.”

Xenophanes would thus be rejecting the possibility that gods come down to earth and assume a distinct corporeal form resembling an exaggerated human guise. This would be consistent with the pronouncement found in fragment B26 that it is not fitting for the gods to move to any other place (οὐδὲ μετέχεσθαι μὲν ἐπιπρέπει ἄλλοτε ἄλληι).

8 Although Homer and Hesiod do not hesitate to note the grim and gruesome nature of warfare, the victory of the epic protagonists Achilles (Iliad), Odysseus (Odyssey), and Zeus (Theogony) ultimately depends on the violent suppression of their enemies (Hector, the suitors, and Typhoeus, respectively).

While the gods do, as Lesher observes, often display these characteristic features when assuming a mortal guise, the rest of Xenophanes’ critical fragments suggest that he intended σφετέρην to refer to human features. Xenophanes observes:

Αἰθίοπες τε ἢ θεοὺς σφετέρους σιμοὺς μέλανας τε
Θρῆικές τε γλαυκοὺς καὶ πυρροὺς ψασὶ πέλεσθαι (B16).

Both the Ethiopians and the Thracians depict the gods as resembling themselves. There seems to be a contradiction here: unless the two races worship entirely different gods, it is impossible for the gods to look like Thracians and like Ethiopians. The human tendency to depict gods with the appearance of their believers results in this type of incongruity. Xenophanes further illustrates this point with a hypothetical premise:

ἀλλ’ εἰ χείρας ἔχον βόες ἢ ἠὲ λέοντες
ἢ γράψαι χείρεσσι καὶ ἔργα τελεῖν ἢ περ ἄνδρες,
ἵπποι μέν ἢ ἰπποῖς βόες δὲ τα βουνὰ ὄμοιας
καὶ ἦ θεῶν ιδέας ἔγραφον καὶ σώματ’ ἔρινον
τοιαῦτα οἶλον περ καῦτοι δέμας εἶχον ἢ καπατοὶ (B15).

Xenophanes demonstrates the flaw in representing the gods as identical in form to the believer by positing a situation in which it is patently absurd. The image of animals creating artistic representations of themselves and their gods demonstrates an innate flaw in deriving the form of the divine from one’s own body: there is no logical limit that prevents the attribution of incongruous or ridiculous properties to objects of universal worship.

While anthropomorphic features such as clothing and hair color are closely related to the specific cultural norms of the believers in a particular region, Xenophanes

10 Cf. the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite 90-154, where Anchises quickly identifies Aphrodite as a goddess despite her disguise.
11 The concept of gods in animal form is not common in Greek religion, aside from Zeus’ occasional metamorphoses. Jaeger (1947, 47) notes that Xenophanes “was not aware that there were such animal gods in Egypt...” If Xenophanes’ audience had any awareness of Egyptian religious practice, it is likely that they considered it exotic and bizarre, if Herodotus’ wonder at it is any indication.
also objects to universal human characteristics being attributed to the divine realm. In the first half of B14, Xenophanes observes that mortals assume that the gods are born (γεννᾶσαι), an attribute not limited to any specific culture, nor indeed to any particular species. The gods are distinguished from human beings in poetry by their everlasting life; Homer and Hesiod frequently refer to the gods as ἀθάνατοι, αἰεὶ γενέται and αἰὲν ἔόντες: undying, everlasting, and existing forever. While the first term implies only that the gods, unlike mortals, never experience death, the latter two suggest that the gods exist always. Hesiod, however, chronicles in detail the births of the gods in the Theogony and Homer makes many casual references to the gods’ lineage.12 Xenophanes, then, does not fault the poets and popular religion for labeling the gods as everlasting, but rather the inconsistency in attributing births to beings that exist forever; if the gods are to be distinct entities from mortal beings, they must completely transcend the cycle of life and death.

The moral arguments raised by Xenophanes against the poetry of Homer and Hesiod in B14 should also be considered in terms of anthropomorphism. The shameful and brutal activity of the gods as represented in epic poetry is objectionable not only because it attributes immorality to the divine realm, but also because it creates an equivalency between human and divine behavior. The specific crimes mentioned (theft, adultery, and deceit) are intrinsically human: the act of theft is usually committed because of some want or necessity, whereas the gods are traditionally represented as “living easily” (ῥεῖα ζῶοντες);13 adultery is the violation of a human convention that is as inappropriate in the divine realm as clothing would be; deception is typically employed when an object of desire cannot be obtained through legitimate means or by force, but the

12 E.g. Zeus is often called “the son of Kronos.”

13 Il. 6.138, Od. 4.805.
gods, if all powerful, need not resort to such tricks. Perhaps Xenophanes is suggesting here that while the thought of gods acting immorally is certainly distasteful, the attribution of moral significance to divine actions is absurd in a way similar to Aristotle’s observation in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “If we go through the list we shall find that all forms of virtuous conduct seem trifling and unworthy of the gods.” (X.viii.7). Lesher astutely observes that we cannot affirm that Xenophanes had arrived at this Aristotelian understanding of the divine and that he may simply be rejecting immoral behavior without committing himself to rejecting all moral dimensions; it is unlikely that Xenophanes did not associate some form of moral goodness with the gods, especially since he advises banqueters to pray τὰ δίκαια δύνασθαι πρήσειν (B1.15-16). Nevertheless, it is reasonable to account for the anthropomorphic flaws as well as the unethical attributes in the specific crimes assigned to the gods by Homer and Hesiod.

We can gather from the critical fragments that Xenophanes’ conception of the divine was that of something pure, free from conflict and immorality, and independent of anthropomorphic features. Although this configuration is formulated in direct opposition to poetic and popular depictions of the gods, in many ways it remains quite traditional. The criticisms that Xenophanes raises often address logical contradictions without repudiating the core idea; for example, Xenophanes maintains the everlasting nature of the gods as found in Homer and Hesiod, but he eliminates the inconsistency found in their accounts by removing the concept of divine birth. The emergence of theodicy is a development found within the poetry of Homer and Hesiod; for example, at the beginning of the *Odyssey* Zeus remarks that humans unfairly assign the blame for all bad things to
the gods (1.32-43). Similarly, Zeus in the *Theogony* is a civilizing and moral force; as Voegelin notes:

> The other gods are “earlier” gods because of their savage lusts, their tyrannical cruelties, and especially because of the uncivilized habit of swallowing their children in order to avoid an aristocratic sharing of rule among the immortals...Only Zeus puts an end to this dreary sequence; for, while his victory is won by force, it is held by the just distribution of his honorable share (*time*) to each of the immortals.  

The victory of Zeus, however, depends on brutal tactics similar to those of his cruel predecessors: in order to retain his authority he resorts to eating Metis (*Theo.* 886-900), just as his father Cronus swallows his own children (459-460). Xenophanes, then, is continuing the tradition of purifying the stories concerning the gods by removing all elements of “savage lusts” and “tyrannical cruelties.”

The most radical feature of Xenophanes’ criticisms is his rejection of anthropomorphic representations of the divine. This element of his theology, though, is understandable after one confronts the contradictions that result from anthropomorphism, such as the incongruity between Thracian gods and Ethiopian gods. While there is room in the Greek pantheon for many gods, which might perhaps explain the existence of a variety of physical features, the existence of universal gods is already quite traditional; Homer, for example, has the Trojans and the Greeks praying to the same gods. The observation of the inconsistency and “vanity of such (physical) distinctions” was, as Jaeger notes, a foreseeable occurrence.  

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14 Voegelin 1957, 133.

Xenophanes’ Positive Theology (B23-B26)

The positive theological fragments (B23-B26) seem far less understandable within the context of Greek religion. Xenophanes, in opposition to the varied depictions of gods mentioned earlier, argues:

εἷς θεός, ἐν τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἰτερώτεροις μέγιστος,
οὔτι δέμας θνητοῖσι ὁμοίοις οὐδὲ νόημα (B23).

While the second line merely reiterates the rejection of anthropomorphic gods found in the critical fragments, the first line begins with the provocative εἷς θεός. The precise meaning of this expression, as Lesher notes, is unclear: is the εἷς acting as a predicate along with the other two adjectives in the fragment (i.e. “god is one, greatest, not like”) or merely as an attributive adjective (i.e. “one god is greatest, not like”)? The former reading incorporates the “exclusive sense” of εἷς found in Homer, notably εἷς κοίρανος ἔστω, εἷς βασιλεύς (Il. 2.204). On this reading, Xenophanes is arguing for the existence of only one god, greatest of all, utterly unlike men in either thought or body. If this is the case, how can we account for the phrase θεοῖσι καὶ ἰτερώτεροις? The most frequent response of modern scholars is that this is a “polar expression” and does not explicitly advocate the existence of a plurality of gods. Heidel supports this claim by noting the presence of similar statements in other monotheistic religious texts, such as Hebrew scripture.

The denial of multiple gods would be quite radical in the context of the polytheistic tradition of Greek religion that existed before the time of Xenophanes and

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16 Lesher 1992, 96.
17 Classen 1989, 92.
19 Heidel 1943, 275.
continued long afterwards; Hermann Fränkel, after calling Xenophanes’ theology a “militant monotheism,” notes that it had very little influence on the mainstream polytheistic tradition.\textsuperscript{20} That Xenophanes absolutely rejected the concept of a multitude of gods is, however, attested by several later sources. Pseudo-Plutarch mentions that Xenophanes argued against the existence of a divine hierarchy (ἡγεμονία), inasmuch as it would not be holy for the gods to be ruled (δεσπόζεσθαι).\textsuperscript{21} More problematic are testimonia that account for Xenophanes’ one god as the one (τὸ ἕν) - the universal essence that unifies the cosmos; Aristotle labels Xenophanes as the first “proponent of the one” (ἐνίσας) and discusses him in the same section as he does Parmenides and Melissus, Eleatic monists (\textit{Metaphysics} 986b.10-27). In the same passage, Aristotle remarks that while Parmenides argued for the unity of the world by definition (κατὰ τὸν λόγον) and Melissus argued unity in terms of material (κατὰ τὴν ὕλην), Xenophanes made no such distinction; instead, Xenophanes εἰς τὸν ἄιδον οὐρανὸν ἀποβλέψας τὸ ἕν εἶναι φησι τὸν θεόν. Xenophanes’ one god, in Aristotle’s analysis, thus seems to be the universe itself (οὐρανὸν). The doxographical tradition after Aristotle, including Theophrastus and his followers,\textsuperscript{22} continues to regard Xenophanes as a monist who argues that everything is one and that the one is god. These interpreters do not suggest that Xenophanes was strictly speaking a monotheist, but rather a pantheist. Burnett observes: “What

\textsuperscript{20} Fränkel 1975, 332.

\textsuperscript{21} Strom. 4; Fr. A 32.

\textsuperscript{22} e.g. Simplicius, Pseudo-Plutarch, the author of the \textit{De Melisso Xenophane Gorgia}, etc. Cf. Finkelberg 1990 for a thorough attempt at reconstructing Theophrastus’ main arguments concerning Xenophanes’ philosophy.
Xenophanes is really concerned to deny is the existence of any gods in the proper sense, and the words ‘One god’ mean ‘No god but the world.’”

There are some difficulties, however, in reading B23 as claim for the existence of only one god, whether it be equivalent to the universe or not. The presence of μέγιστος indicates that εἷς does not carry an exclusive sense; the use of εἷς with the superlative is also found in Homer (εἷς οἰώνος ἄριστος, II. 12.243) and there it means simply “one best.” Moreover, the “polar expression” in the first line still creates difficulties; if Xenophanes wished to pronounce the existence of a single god, why would he use an expression that would only serve to muddle his point? As Guthrie, who favors a pantheist reading, concedes, this is “suprising carelessness.”

Xenophanes also refers to gods in the plural in other fragments. Burnett argues that the “the language of polytheism” is natural in the elegaic fragments and that other instances of polytheistic references are found when Xenophanes is describing the flaws of epic poetry, which typically represents the divine as a plurality of gods. While it is true that Xenophanes often refers to the gods in the plural when attacking the representations of poets and popular religion (e.g. B14.1, B15.1, B16.1), he also frequently mentions gods where no immediate criticism is apparent (B1.24, B18.1, B34.2). Furthermore, Xenophanes is consistent in rejecting the epic representations of the gods in the elegiac fragments (πλάσματα τῶν προτέρων, B1.22), so there is no reason to expect that his desire to adopt traditional language would trump his interest in promoting a true understanding of the divine. At any rate, whether this one

23 Burnet 1930, 128.
24 Stokes 1971, 77-79.
25 Guthrie 1971, 1.375.
26 Burnet 1930, 128-129.
god is the only god or whether it is the greatest among many, Xenophanes opts to discuss it exclusively in several fragments.

The nature of the god’s preeminence (μέγιστος) is also unclear; the adjective μέγας can refer to size, strength, and degree, among other things. Presumably the god’s greatness is located within the fields of honor and might, which are the common attributes that are associated with Zeus when he is called μέγιστος in Homer and Hesiod. The god is universal and omnipotent, since it moves everything (πάντα κραδαίνει, B26). It is also possible that Xenophanes is using μέγιστος spatially; he does not present an incorporeal god, but rather one who is unlike mortals “in respect to body,” (δέμας).

Although Xenophanes is clearly not attributing to his one god the same immense human form possessed by the gods in epic poetry, it is not unreasonable to assume that his god, since it apparently has some spatial dimensions, possesses a size analogous to its power.

The other fragments put more emphasis, however, on the god’s cognitive and perceptive attributes (νόημα) than on its physical form (δέμας). Unlike human beings, who have distinct organs for the purpose of thought and perception, Xenophanes’ one god performs these functions as a whole (οὖλος, B24). The term οὖλος invites a number of critical questions, notably whether the god’s “wholeness” means homogeneity (that is a total lack of internal diversity). This question is markedly more complicated if one assumes that Xenophanes’ god is the universe; there is an immediate incongruity between the visibly differentiable world and the notion of a materially uniform universe.

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27 cf. LSJ s.v. μέγας

28 Lesher (1992, 99-100) details the connection between μέγιστος, κράτος, and κῦδος.

29 Clement thus seems to be incorrect when he introduces Xenophanes’ god as ἀσώματος, although one could argue that it is possible to interpret “unlike in body” as “without body,” the description of a stationary divine nature as opposed to a locomotive one in B26 seems, as Lesher (1992, 100) argues, “inconceivable as a description of a being existing in a completely non-spatial way.”
Finkelberg observes that it is unlikely that Xenophanes explicitly argued for a homogenous god since, had he mentioned this, Aristotle would have been able to categorize Xenophanes’ monism as κατὰ τὴν ὑλὴν.\textsuperscript{30}

There is, however, little doubt that Xenophanes’ one god does not have the same internal distinctions that humans have; there is a unity found in its cognitive and perceptive faculties and these are also linked to the god’s efficient powers. Xenophanes mentions that his god ἀπάνευθε πόνοι νόου φρένι πάντα κραδάινει (B25). Just as the god perceives “as a whole,” so do its mental faculties have the power to move (literally “shake,” κραδάινει) elements within the world (πάντα) as well as observe them. The brief fragment combines the notions of perception, thought, and action into a fluid process. The god’s powers reside in “the mind of its mind” (νόου φρένι), an image that is abstract and difficult to imagine. The νόος and the φρενί are two separate organs that have particular perceptive and cognitive functions. The νόος traditionally is associated with the function of perceiving and processing information; in Homer, the verb νοεῖν is often connected with sight, but von Fritz notes that the “most original meaning...seemed to have been ‘to realize or to understand a situation.’”\textsuperscript{31} The φρένι is generally associated with more deliberative forms of mental activity; the Homeric hero often considers and ponders κατὰ φρένα.\textsuperscript{32} The one god does not have distinct organs of perception and deliberation, but rather can accommodate both feats in its νόου φρένι; the normal human

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[30] Finkelberg 1990, 117-118. Finkelberg also notes that only two sources mention the homogeneity of Xenophanes’ god, both of which are post-Aristotelian and not likely to have a more comprehensive text than Aristotle did.
\item[31] von Fritz (1943) 93.
\item[32] Cf. Cunliffe 1963 s.v. φρήν III.2b and φρονέω 6-9. It should be noted that the hero often deliberates both in his mind (κατὰ φρένα), and in his “heart” (κατὰ ὕμοι), where the ὕμοι perhaps represents the emotive function of will and purpose (as Snell 1943, 11-15 argues, though he admits that the distinction between head and heart is often blurred even in Homer).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
sequence of perceiving a situation, deliberating, and then reacting to the situation is thus seamlessly (ἀπάνευθε πόνοι) integrated into one simultaneous intellectual process.

The lack of effort involved in the one god’s comprehensive cognitive process is also related to its static nature. Xenophanes argues that it is “unfitting” (οὐδὲ...ἐπιπρέπει) for the god to move (κινούμενος, μετέρχεσθαι), and so it remains motionless in the same place (B 26). The absence of motion is a radical departure from the presentation of gods in Homer who frequently travelled down to earth to influence the behavior of humans; Xenophanes’ god needs not move at all to shake (κραδαίνει) the world, whereas even Zeus, who can shake the heavens while seated on his throne, accomplishes his will through the physical movement of nodding his head.\(^{33}\) There is also the possibility that Xenophanes is not only rejecting divine locomotion, but also divine change, inasmuch as movement is closely related to change in Greek philosophy.\(^{34}\) While, as Finkelberg notes, this is an anachronistic interpolation of a later, metaphorical usage of κίνησις, the absence of locomotion and toil is essentially “tantamount to freedom from all kinds of movement including change.”\(^{35}\)

The constructive theological fragments are consistent with the conceptions of the divine implicit in the critical fragments. Xenophanes argues against anthropomorphism, impurity, and conflict in the realm of the divine in the critical fragments; in these positive fragments he postulates a god who is unlike mortals in body or mind, whose universal power and influence (μέγιστος, B23; πάντα κραδαίνει, B25) is thoroughly grounded in its

\(^{33}\) Il. 1.530; cf. Guthrie (1971, 374), who notes that Xenophanes is most likely alluding to this passage in the Iliad.

\(^{34}\) Fränkel 1975, 332.

\(^{35}\) Finkelberg 1990, 109-110.
particular intellectual process, and who does not suffer from any sort of external strife
(i.e. from gods of equal power, who don’t exist) or internal conflict (i.e. from distinct
organs of perception and deliberation). The rejection of anthropomorphism is echoed in
the dissimilarity between the greatest god and mortal men in terms of body and mind, and
the insistence on purity is implicit in the stationary and intellectual nature of the one god;
it would be impossible for this divine entity to be engaged in any sort of illicit behavior
inasmuch it is unfitting (οὐδὲ...ἐπιπρέπει) for it to leave its particular domain.

The nature of the god’s unity is the most problematic element in Xenophanes’
positive theological remarks. While it is clear that the oneness of god is a crucial element
in his interpretation of the divine, he does not explicitly note whether this god coexists
with lesser and subordinate gods, or whether this is the only god, or whether this one god
is the universe itself. Aristotle’s remark that Xenophanes did not make clear (οὐδὲν
dιεσαφήνισεν, Meta. 986b.22-23) the nature of his monistic theory indicates that the
uncertainty concerning the nature of Xenophanean divine unity arose very early in the
philosophical tradition.36 That his conception of the divine was unified, however, is
perhaps more important than labeling it with distinctions that are in danger of being
anachronistic. The question of monotheism or polytheism, as Guthrie notes, “never had
the same prominence in the Greek mind” as they did for other religions such as
Christianity and Judaism.37 In labeling Xenophanes with these distinctions, we must
assume “that a thinker is obliged to make up his mind about his adherence to one or the

36 Finkelberg (1990, 111), however, notes the extent of the doxography and declares that the equivalence
between Xenophanes’ one god and the universe is “one of the best attested Presocratic conceptions, and
anyone who seeks to dismiss it must be prepared to face this fact.” See my discussion below concerning the
unreliability of the doxographic tradition.

37 Guthrie 1971, 1.375.
other of the mutually exclusive systems.”\textsuperscript{38} The unity of this one god and its universality are the most striking features of Xenophanes’ conception of the divine, and it would therefore be unsurprising if Xenophanes did not, as Aristotle noted, give a more detailed definition of its features. Even if he had made implicit or explicit comments on this question, those who transmitted Xenophanes’ work, which was woefully incomplete very early on, may not have fretted over preserving details in which Aristotle and later scholars would have had great interest.

Although a correlation between the critical fragments and constructive theological ones is evident, the nature of their connection needs to be explicated: how exactly did Xenophanes devise his unified theological program? Do his critical fragments provide the basis for his positive comments, or, on the contrary, do his attacks against the poets and popular religion follow after he had developed his unified conception of the divine? Just as there is scholarly disagreement over the nature of Xenophanes’ one god, there is also a major critical rift concerning the methods by which he conceived of this divine unity.

Although there are many different interpretations of Xenophanes’ methodology, the two most prominent approaches portray Xenophanes as either an inductive thinker relying on personal experience and inferences drawn from autopsy, much like his Ionian predecessors and contemporaries, or a more deductive thinker who eschews the conclusions drawn from sense perception and relies on more abstract and logical forms of argumentation, as did his alleged student Parmenides. The former interpretation relies primarily on the extant fragments, while the latter depends more on the doxographical tradition. I will first examine Xenophanes’ use of inductive methods and their application

\textsuperscript{38} Voegelin 1957, 179.
in his conception of the divine before I will address the possibility of his reliance on deductive argumentation.

Xenophanes the Inductive Thinker

Xenophanes’ inductive and empirical tendencies are evident in fragment B18, which seems to contain a justification for an inductive approach and might well be a programmatic statement for his methods of examination:

οὔτοι ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς πάντα Ἡσοὶ Ζητοῦτοι ὑπέδειξαν,
ἀλλὰ χρόνων ζητοῦντες ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἄμεινον. (B 18)

Though the fragment is only two lines long, it contains many ambiguities: what beginning (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς) is Xenophanes talking about? Will the gods eventually reveal (ὑπέδειξαν) everything to mortals? Do they reveal some things, but not everything (πάντα)? What is the function of “better” (ἄμεινον)? From these and other uncertainties Lesher postulates seventy-two possible readings of this fragment.³⁹ Despite these doubts, it is clear that a contrast is drawn between the absence of complete divine revelation in the first line and the existence of improvement by human inquiry (ζητοῦντες). The nature of this “improvement” (ἄμεινον) needs clarification, since our impressions of Xenophanes’ empiricism depend on how seeking and discovering relate to “better.” Some have suggested that ἄμεινον is adverbial and means “progressively better.”⁴⁰ This is a plausible interpretation given the presence of χρόνων (we were ignorant in the beginning, but as time goes on we discover better and better conclusions), but one that perhaps overextends the uses of the Greek comparative.⁴¹ Lesher argues that ἄμεινον here seems to mean “a

⁴⁰ Theodor Gomperz (1973, 1.132) translates B18 “Zeigten die Götter den Sterblichen doch nicht Alles von Anfang, Sondern suchend finden sie selbst allmählich das Bessre” (emphasis mine).
better”: while inquiry is not perfect method that will reveal the truth about everything, it is the better alternative to trusting in divine signs that from the outset have not existed.42

This interpretation seems preferable, especially since Xenophanes uses the comparative in other fragments to present the better of two alternatives;43 the two alternatives in this fragment are divine revelation and induction based on inquiry.

The benefits of an inductive approach are predicated on the impossibility of divine revelation; although Xenophanes posits that his god influences the world (πάντα κραδαίνει, B25), he rejects the possibility that it has revealed (ὑπέδειξαν, B18) information to mortals. Lesher observes that the addition of the ὑπό prefix attaches a discreet element to the verb δείκνυμι, and therefore he translates it as “to show or display in a secretive, partial, or indirect manner.”44 It was commonly thought that the gods did communicate with men through discreet and often ambiguous signs and omens and that the science of divination could interpret these messages. Heraclitus observed that Apollo οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει (B93).

Xenophanes rejects the existence of these discreet signs and offers inquiry as a more viable option of obtaining information. It is perhaps not coincidental that Xenophanes, as a “hard-headed empiricist,”45 observes that the rainbow, the one mortals call Iris, is actually a cloud (B32); in doing so he not only provides a rational explanation based on experience for a natural phenomenon, he also strips the rainbow of its

41 Cf. Tulin 1992, 130-1 for a brief discussion of this interpretation and its history.
43 In B2 Xenophanes remarks that his wisdom is better than the athletic prowess of other men (...ὁμοίως γὰρ ἄμεινων / ἀνδρῶν ἢ τοῖποι ἴματέρθη σοφῶν).
45 Mourelatos 1965, 350.
association with a divine messenger who often relayed messages from the gods to the world of mortals. Lesher remarks on this fragment:

These two lines of Fr. 32 embody, in a remarkably compressed way, the intellectual revolution Xenophanes and his fellow Ionian physiologoi initiated: nature is not a bulletin board displaying cryptic signals from deities, it is a realm of physical realities to be described, named, and classified in terms of their perceptible qualities, and understood entirely in terms of ordinary natural substances and forces.”

These empirical and inductive methods are a consistent feature in Xenophanes’ natural philosophy. Hippolytus remarks that Xenophanes used his discovery of shells on inland mountains and impressions of fish in quarries in Syracuse as “proofs” (ἀποδείξεις) for his theory that nature is mixture of earth and water. This testimonium is perhaps corroborated by fragment B37, in which Xenophanes claims that water drips down in some caves. Many of Xenophanes’ comments on natural phenomena are based on empirical conclusions; for example, he notes that the sun travels over the earth and warms it (B31), which seems like an obvious and unremarkable conclusion. Fränkel faults Xenophanes’ “strong empirical tendency” in his natural philosophy, noting that, aside from the fossil example cited above, his descriptions of the physical world are “forced and unconvincing” and that “everything is explained on the basis of everyday experience, and every effort is made to prevent any considerable widening of our ideas concerning the world about us.” Fränkel’s assertion that Xenophanes’ empirical

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47 Hippolytus Ref. 1.14.5; Fr. A33. It should be noted here, however, that doxography concerning Xenophanes is contaminated by anachronistic attributions and is often sketchy; Hippolytus, for example, also attributes to Xenophanes a spherical god and Parmenidean conceptions of Being, both of which are highly unlikely, in the same fragment. For more on the doxographical tradition, cf. Lesher 1992, 189-196; KRS 1995, 165-6; Finkelberg 1990. I address the Eleatic/rationalist view of Xenophanes’ theology below.

methods lead to simplistic and reductive results is perhaps supported by a testimonium from Hippolytus (Ref. 1.14.3; fr. A33): Xenophanes seems to have claimed that the sun is generated anew every day (γίνεσθαι καὶ ἕκάστην ἡμέραν), an observation which resonates with personal experience but is logically unsound.

Although Xenophanes’ empirical tendencies so far have been shown to be quite prominent, the use of inductive methods to construct a theology is problematic. Fragment B34 illustrates the problem:

καὶ τὸ μὲν οὖν ὑπὲρ ὁμοίως οὔτε ἔμνη ἦδεν οὐδὲ τις ἔσται εἰδώς ἂμφοι θεῶν τε καὶ ἁσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων· εἰ γὰρ καὶ τὰ μᾶλλον τὰ τυχεῖν τετελεσμένον εἰπών, αὐτὸς ὢμοις οὐκ οἴδε δόκος δ’ ἐπὶ πᾶσι τέτυκται.

This fragment complicates the prospect of a theology based on autopsy and inference. On the one hand, we would expect a thinker so fond of empirical methods to use them systematically; on the other hand, Xenophanes seems in this fragment to adopt a sceptical position that calls into question the potential for an inductive method to illuminate material that is beyond complete human understanding. Even a staunch empiricist might forego a technique based on evidence-gathering and experience in examining a realm that, according to him, would never be known certainly (σαφές) and could only be determined through supposition (δόκος).

Later thinkers have attributed various different degrees of scepticism to Xenophanes, from a complete disavowal of understanding, as Sotion appears to have said, to a general distrust of sense perception, as Pseudo-Plutarch and perhaps

49 Fränkel 1975, 334.

50 Diogenes Laertius claims ψηφι d’ ὁ Σωτίων πρῶτον αὐτὸν εἰπεῖ τὰ πάντα (A1.20). It is possible that Sotion is misinterpreting Xenophanes’ ἁσα λέγω περὶ πάντων, as though Xenophanes were denying that anything that he said could be understood certainly instead of everything that he said. Guthrie
Theophrastus suggest.\(^{51}\) Xenophanes’ own words, however, do not appear to support either of these positions: the primary obstacle to clear knowledge is not the fallibility of the senses nor the absence of a sure criterion for judgment, but the limited extent of human experience. The essence of this problem is illustrated in fragment B38:

\[
\varepsilon\iota\ \mu\eta\ \chi\lambda\omicron\iota\omicron\omicron\omicron\upsilon\omicron\\acute{o}\nu\hspace{1em}\zeta\varepsilon\omicron\omicron\varsigma\ \mu\acute{e}l\i,\ \pi\omicron\lambda\lambda\omicron\nu\ \acute{e}f\acute{a}s\omicron\nu\ \\
\gamma\lambda\omega\upsilon\sigma\sigma\omicron\nu\ \acute{a}i\kappa\alpha\ \\ \\
\pi\alpha\lambda\sigma\vartheta\acute{a}i.
\]

The human conception of sweetness is limited to what particular foods are available at a certain place and time. If someone were to ask us what food was the sweetest, we could not answer absolutely; the problem is not that our tongues are untrustworthy gauges of sweetness, nor that the criterion for judgment in this matter is uncertain (for we can say certainly that ice cream is sweeter than a pickle), but rather that we have had a very limited experience with food (e.g. there may be sweeter pastries in remote regions that we have not yet visited, there may have been or will be a time when sweeter foods were or are produced, etc.). Similarly, our understanding of the divine is necessarily reduced to supposition because it exists outside the domain of human experience. As Xenophanes has noted earlier, the gods do not in any way communicate with mortals and mortals do not have any other avenues through which they can experience and make inductive inferences about the divine. The wording in B34 illustrates this dilemma: mortals do not have certain understanding because they cannot see (\(\acute{i}d\epsilon\nu\)) or have knowledge based on sight (\(\epsilon\iota\delta\omicron\omicron\omicron\)) of the gods; although \(\acute{o}i\delta\alpha\) does not always bear connotations of visual experience, the parallel \(\acute{i}d\epsilon\nu\) on the previous line suggests that we should honor the

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\(^{51}\) Ps.-Plutarch writes \(\acute{a}πο\varphi\acute{a}i\ νεται \acute{d}ε\ κα\acute{e} τ\acute{a}ς \acute{a}ι\acute{o}\nu\omicron\acute{e}s\ ι\acute{a}i\nu\ ι\acute{a}i\ κα\acute{e} \kappa\acute{a}d\acute{e}\omicron\omicron\omicron\ \\
\acute{a}ν \acute{a}i\kappa\alpha\omicron\ νι\acute{a}ς \kappa\acute{a}\iota\omicron\omicron\ τ\omicron\ λ\omicron\gammad\omicron\nu\\ \\
\acute{d}ia\varphi\alpha\acute{e}l\alpha\acute{e}l\alpha\ (A32.6-7). Finkelberg (1990, 160-162) argues that Ps.-Plutarch contains accurate (i.e. not contaminated with other traditions), albeit garbled, transmissions of Theophrastus’ writing.
etymological connection between the two verbs. Xenophanes, then, as Fränkel notes, is specifically rejecting “only a knowing rooted in vision, or at least in experience.”

The remoteness of the gods from mortal experience presents a significant obstacle to inductive understanding of the divine. It is, however, worth noting that arguing the limitations of empiricism does not necessarily constitute a complete denial of its relevance in the pursuit of theology. Though we may never see or know anything σαφές about the gods, we can formulate suppositions (δόκος). These beliefs, while inferior to certain knowledge, are superior to groundless assertions and are not to be categorically rejected. While in B34 Xenophanes concedes that he cannot offer any clear and certain truths about the gods or the universe, he asserts in B35 (which, as Lesher notes, is likely the logical complement of B34) that his opinions should be regarded as “like truth” (ταῦτα δεδοξάσθω μὲν ἐοικότα τοῖς ἔτυμοισι). While the gods themselves lie outside the realm of human experience, Xenophanes can formulate suppositions concerning the divine that resemble truth (ἐοικότα τοῖς ἔτυμοισι, B35) and are a better alternative to traditional beliefs in divine communication (B18). His attempt to construct a positive theology would then depend on examining what the divine is not, taking inconsistent and poorly reasoned religious beliefs as evidence against those interpretations.

The argument for an inductive method in Xenophanes’ theology in its most basic form is summarized well by McKirahan:

Xenophanes proceeds in the following way. First, collect a wide variety of beliefs on the topic... Second, note where these beliefs agree and where they disagree.... Third, identify a principle which accounts for the disagreement.... Fourth, eliminate the absurdities and inconsistencies, to see if there remains a core of truth on which to base a new theory.... And

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52 Fränkel 1974, 123.

finally, develop a theory which is based not on uncritical acceptance of tradition, but on critical reflection in accordance with rational criteria.  

Naturally, then, an empirical model will begin with Xenophanes’ criticisms of poetic and popular representations of the gods. I have already noted the contradiction that exists in fragment B16:

Αἰθιοπές τε Ἐθεοῦς σφυτέρους σιμοὺς μέλανάς τε
Θρῆικές τε γλαυκοὺς καὶ πυρρούς (φασὶ πέλεσθαι).

The Thracian and Ethiopian depictions of the gods are incongruous; it is impossible for the gods to have the features of both the Thracians and the Ethiopians. Furthermore, Xenophanes’ choice of examples suggests that he is drawing on wider experiential knowledge than the mere contrast of these two particular peoples. He generalizes the dilemma by selecting ethnic groups located at opposite extremes of the known world; the implication is that across the globe depictions of the gods differ in correlation to the varied physical appearances of their believers. The desire to present the gods as physically similar to those who believe in them is endemic to all humans, from the extreme north to the extreme south.

After observing the various representations of the divine and noting the differences, did Xenophanes formulate a principle that accounted for these discrepancies? The fragments suggest that he had developed an argument against the “genetic fallacy,” which Lesher defines as “inferring the falsity of a belief from its disreputable origins.”

In this case, Xenophanes observes that the common tendency to represent the gods with human features is based on an ungrounded assumption of the equivalence between the form of the believer and the form of the god. Despite the widespread belief that the gods

54 McKirahan 1989, 243.
communicate with human beings through omens and divination, the practitioners and authorities of popular religion do not demonstrate any knowledge of the divine that could not have been gleaned from human experience; the gods act and appear as though they were humans: they have desires and passions, exist within familial and political structures, and physically resemble their human followers.

The disreputable origins of a belief do not, as Lesher observes, necessarily mean that the conclusions themselves are false, since one can accidentally speak the truth (B34.3-4).\textsuperscript{56} These weak premises, however, indicate that the believer does not have adequate or justifiable cause for his or her beliefs. For example, many who claim to have experienced an encounter with an extraterrestrial life form describe the alien with (often exaggerated) humanoid features; that such an alien creature resembles the human form or can be derived from popular science fiction does not necessarily contradict their claims, but it casts suspicion on their experience and raises rational doubts concerning the source of their knowledge. Xenophanes illustrates the flaws in the anthropomorphic tendencies of humans by extending this practice to the animal world in B15. The \textit{reductio ad absurdum} effectively demonstrates the underlying problems with the attribution of one’s own traits to the gods; if the gods are depicted as mere reflections of their followers, there is no logical means of determining what characteristics are appropriate and preventing such ridiculous situations.

Xenophanes seems to suggest that he genetic fallacy of anthropomorphizing the divine among his contemporaries has it roots in the Homeric and Hesiodic depictions of the gods, inasmuch as popular religion owes a very great debt to their teachings (B10). The gods are consistently represented as having human appearance and engaging in

\textsuperscript{56} Lesher 1992, 93-94.
mortal behavior. Zeus has shaggy hair and dark eyebrows (Il. 1.528-530), Hephaestus suffers from lameness (Od. 8.300), and adjectives such as καλλιπάρῃος and καλλιπλόκαμος are used to describe women as well as goddesses. The gods, furthermore, fight on the battlefield with the human warriors and are occasionally wounded (Il. 5.846-863), they are susceptible to seduction (Il. 14.153-353), and, as Xenophanes observes in B11, they often act in ways considered immoral among humans in pursuit of their desires and interests. He reads these fundamentally anthropomorphic representations of the gods as indications of an unjustified and flawed understanding of the divine; Homer and Hesiod draw on human experience and attribute human traits to divine figures, with the result that the gods seem to act in ways incongruous with their position of honor among mortals.

Xenophanes’ use of inductive reasoning is in some ways similar to the methods used by the poets and the followers of popular religion: both draw on human experiences and apply them to the realm of the divine. Xenophanes’ approach, however, offers two significant advantages: first, he does not accept all forms of human behavior as appropriate to the world of the divine, but rather critically examines the world, eliminates inconsistencies and impurities from his observations, and then infers what traits are likely to belong to the gods; secondly, he does not offer certain (σαφές) propositions, but rather suppositions like the truth (B35) which are a better alternative to the accounts of poets and religious authorities (B18). In this empirical approach, the intellectual nature, unmoving position, and unity of the one god are suppositions that eliminate the inconsistencies and incongruities found in the traditional representations of the gods. In short, Xenophanes’ god is free from the problems that he finds among the

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57 Cunliffe 1963 s.v. καλλιπάρῃος and καλλιπλόκαμος.
anthropomorphic deities in literature and in culture: inconsistency, insufficiency, and discord.

Xenophanes, Deductive Argumentation, and the Doxographical Tradition

Although strong empirical tendencies can be found in some of his fragments, we must confront the portrait of the Xenophanes in fragments B23-26 as “all dogma and all flat assertion.” 58 None of these fragments draws on empirical methods explicitly, and readers in antiquity detected a fervor and certainty in these fragments far removed from limitations of human knowledge concerning the divine found in fragment B34.59 If Xenophanes wanted to convey that his critical observations provided the basis for his positive theological commentary, he could have further developed his argumentation in these attacks on anthropomorphism 60 and then later made the connection between these two groups much clearer; as it is, there is much evidence to support that Xenophanes’ conception of the divine was consistent in the critical and constructive fragments, but there is little trace in the fragments themselves of a strong causal connection between the two.

Later doxographical writers suggest that Xenophanes derived his concept of the divine from a number of deductive arguments using inferences based not on sense experience and induction but rather on abstracted logical premises. The pseudo-


59 e.g. Sextus’ remark that Timon called Xenophanes only “partly free of conceit” (ὑπάτυφος) because he positively asserted (ἐκογμάτιζε) that everything was one (fr. 831; fr. A35). Finkelberg (1990, 129-130) observes that Timon, a philosopher who admired the sceptical attitude of Xenophanes, would have preferred to regard him as consistently sceptical and so his concession is an indication that Xenophanes was more dogmatic and less cautious in his positive remarks. The “scepticism” of Xenophanes is, however, not quite what later sceptical thinkers had developed (as I have noted above).

60 Lesher (1992, 92-94) notes that in B16 Xenophanes does not phrase the contrast of the Ethiopian and Thracian gods in such a way as to emphasize the contradiction (i.e. by selecting the same traits differing among particular tribes) and suggests that Xenophanes is not making arguments but rather observations.
Aristotelian document *De Melisso Xenophane Gorgia* (A28) presents several of these logical arguments. While some of them endorse conclusions that can be found in the fragments, such as the impossibility of divine generation and the one god being the strongest of all (977a), others promote theories that appear to be distinctly post-Xenophanean, such as the god’s sphericity (977b). Such arguments reflect the structure and content of Parmenides’ arguments for the unity of “Being.”

The later testimonia suffer from various types of corruption, but the most significant source of confusion is the “Parmenidization” of Xenophanes’ philosophy. Xenophanes is associated with Parmenides and the Eleatic school early in the philosophical tradition. Plato remarks that the Eleatic tribe “began with Xenophanes and even earlier” (*Soph.* 242c-d; fr.A29) and Aristotle notes that Xenophanes was said to be Parmenides’ teacher (*Meta.* 986b; fr. A30). The nature of the relationship between these two thinkers is uncertain; while it is probable that Parmenides drew some inspiration from Xenophanes, the extent of that influence is exaggerated by the tendency of doxographers to fit thinkers into the “teacher-student” model of philosophical succession. The range of scholarly opinion on this matter is vast: some see a very weak relationship between the two, while others argue that Parmenides’ thought is fundamentally grounded in Xenophanes’ work. The sophisticated language and argumentation found in Parmenides’ writing seem far removed from the ideas found in

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62 Cf. KRS 1995, 4-5.

63 Such as KRS (1995, 165), who claim that the connection between the two “obviously depends on the superficial similarity between motionless one deity of the former and the motionless sphere of Being in the latter.”

64 Finkelberg (1990, 166) argues that “it would be hard to point out even one important Parmenidean doctrine which is not, in one way or another, rooted in Xenophanes’ teaching.”
Xenophanes’ poetry. Although several of Xenophanes’ fragments include ambiguous statements and unconventional terms, nothing in his work approaches Parmenides’ χρὴ τὸ λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ’ ἐὼν ἔμεναι· ἕστι γὰρ εἶναι, / μηδὲν δ’ ὄψω ἔστιν (B6.1-2). There are, however, instances of inferential thinking in Xenophanes’ work, such as the hypothetical predictions in B15 and B34. While these appear to be based on autoptic experience (the incongruity of ethnic representations of the gods; the limits of empirical knowledge), is it possible that Xenophanes formed inferential arguments based on logical premises, as well?

Finkelberg argues that there is no reason to assume that Xenophanes was incapable of employing logical proofs; Kahn has argued that this method of argumentation can be found as early as Anaximander, with whom Xenophanes is said to have studied. If Xenophanes did use deductive syllogisms and proofs, it is difficult to detect these authentic arguments from the Parmenidean influence in the doxography; of the six arguments attributed to Xenophanes in the MXG, Finkelberg concedes that only one (for the existence of one god) can possibly be traced back to Xenophanes. Finkelberg, however, conjectures that a true argument of Xenophanes can be found Ps. Plutarch’s Stromateis:

άλλ’ εἶναι λέγει τὸ πᾶν ἀεὶ ὡσαμ’ ἐ’ γὰρ γίνοιτο τοῦτο, φησίν, ἀναγκαῖον πρῶτοτού μὴ εἶναι· τὸ μὴ ὄν δὲ ὦκ ἂν γένοιτο οὔδ’ ἂν τὸ μὴ ὃν ποιήσαι τι οὕτε

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65 E.g. the ἕς ἥς in B23 and several terms in B18, as noted by Lesher 1991.
66 E.g. νόου φήμ (B25).
68 Kahn 1958 passim.
69 As Theophrastus wrote, according to Diogenes Laertius (Vit. Phil. 9.21; fr. A2).
70 Finkelberg 1990, 137.
ὑπὸ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος γένοιτ’ ἃν τι (A 32.3-6, bolded words are omitted or altered by Finkelberg).

This deductive proof for the ungenerated nature of the god (τὸ πᾶν - the equivalence between god and the universe is consistent in the later doxography) is, as Finkelberg argues, based on the account of Theophrastus, who is likely to have had access to a version of Xenophanes’ text free from Parmenidean contamination.\(^71\) There are, however, a number of details that complicate this interpretation: first, Finkelberg replaces οὐδ’ with οὐτ’ and removes the articles (in bold), on the grounds that the article was a sporadic phenomenon in poetry and that this would have been a natural addition by later doxographers;\(^72\) secondly, Ps. Plutarch inserts this argument into the section covering Xenophanes’ physical doctrine, which would imply that even if this were found in Theophrastus there is some “doxographical confusion” regarding its context.\(^73\) Although Finkelberg diligently attempts to cull reliable information from these later writers, the doxography is too corrupt and contaminated with later ideas and methods to be treated as a reliable source in this matter. It is clear that many of these later writers based their accounts on the writings of Aristotle and Theophrastus and, moreover, that they often misconstrue these sources; for example, Simplicius argues that Xenophanes asserted that god was neither finite nor infinite (οὔτε δὲ ἀπειρον οὔτε πεπερασμένον εἶναι, A31), which is clearly a misreading of Aristotle who says that Xenophanes did not make clear (οὐδὲν διεσαφήνισεν, A30) whether his god was finite or infinite.

\(^{71}\) Finkelberg 1990, 137-146.

\(^{72}\) Finkelberg 1990, 141.

\(^{73}\) Finkelberg 1990, 138.
The account of Xenophanes in Aristotle, as we have seen, indicates that if he did make arguments supporting and explaining the nature of his one god, Aristotle either did not have access to them or did not deem them worthy of discussion.\(^{74}\) Perhaps Xenophanes’ theology, as Jaeger suggests, “is not really philosophical at all, but springs from an immediate sense of awe at the sublimity of the divine.”\(^{75}\) The emphasis on what is seemly (ἐπιπρέπει, B26) suggests that the fundamental and undefended goodness of Xenophanes’ god is at least as important as any of the features possibly derived from argumentation. Burkert marks this as a significant element of Xenophanes’ theology, remarking that “for the first time, speaking about the divine is dominated by postulates of what is fitting.”\(^{76}\) Heidel adds that his conviction “is not born of knowledge but of faith.”\(^{77}\)

The lack of clear argumentation in Xenophanes’ theological fragments leads many scholars, as the ones listed above, to doubt the philosophical value of his conception of the divine. It is clear, however, that Xenophanes incorporated induction and inferential arguments in his work and that authors as early as Plato, Aristotle, and Theophrastus saw fit to discuss him among other philosophers, even if they could not decipher clear philosophical arguments in his work. Although his poetry did not satisfy the rigorous distinctions of Aristotle, there is no indication that Xenophanes intended to present his ideas to an audience expecting a clear and organized system of arguments, much less arguments fulfilling the anachronistic standards that apply to Parmenides and

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\(^{74}\) Cf. Aristotle’s final remark on Xenophanes and Melissus in this section: οἱ μὲν δύο καὶ πάμπαν ὡς ὀντες μικρὸν ἀγριοτέρου (Meta. 986b; fr. A30).

\(^{75}\) Jaeger 1947, 49.

\(^{76}\) Burkert 1985, 308.

\(^{77}\) Heidel 1943, 275.
later thinkers; the elegiac fragments B1 and B2 are clearly intended for an audience steeped in tradition, and the *silloi* and other fragments do not incorporate much technical vocabulary or abstract thought that would alienate those not specializing in philosophy. What then would have convinced Xenophanes’ audience to accept his radical new interpretation of the divine? The following chapters will explore the concept of Xenophanes’ poetic authority and how he integrates the contemporary inductive philosophical methods mentioned in this chapter with a more traditional poetic persona to reinvent the role of the poet as an expert on the divine.
By rejecting the anthropomorphic and immoral gods found in epic poetry, Xenophanes is questioning the authority of Homer and Hesiod as the primary educators of Greece. The epic poets cite the divine Muses as the source for their poetic revelations; the Muses teach the bard and give him ἀοιδή (Od. 8.498),78 Hesiod reports a personal encounter with the goddesses (Th. 22-35), and both poets invoke them at the beginning of their epics and at appropriate times within the poems, such as the introduction to the catalogue of ships (Il. 2.484-493). Xenophanes claims to have no such access to the world of the divine; instead, he argues that men learn not from divine revelation but through inquiry (B18). As we have seen, however, there are limitations to the utility of inquiry when one wishes to learn about the gods, inasmuch as the divine exists outside the realm of human experience. If Xenophanes does not acquire knowledge through the traditional connection between the bards and Muses, and if he cannot offer insight from a personal experience in this particular matter, why should his audience subscribe to his beliefs concerning the gods?

To answer this question, one must first consider the vast difference in social and intellectual standards between the world of epic and Xenophanes’ world. I will therefore first explore the nature of the gods, truth, and authority as it is found in the works of the epic poets Homer and Hesiod; afterwards, I will consider Xenophanes’ treatment of these

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78 For the concept of “song” in Homer as both the capacity to recite poetry and the poem itself, see Walsh 1984, 9-10.
topics in order to examine the extent to which Xenophanes has revised and reimagined poetic authority. The epic poets depict a world in which the gods are operative in many different facets of life, from meteorological phenomena to psychological and emotional impulses such as courage and anger. Their authority is derived not from their ability to produce truths that can be independently verified by the listener, but rather from the prestige inherent to their social position and from the belief that they possess knowledge of remote topics communicated from a divine source. Xenophanes seems to accept the role of the poet as an educator and religious advisor, but the source of his authority is not based on a connection with the gods; rather his claim to authority relies on judgments and inferences drawn from practical experiences and on the traditional elements found in his poetic persona: an aged wanderer who has seen many things and can express his thoughts on the divine with traditional reverence as well as iconoclastic disdain.

**The Divine World of Homer**

The pervasive presence of the divine is a common feature in the epic poems of Homer and Hesiod, though the nature of this divine influence develops through the epic tradition. The direct involvement of the gods in the world of men is never questioned; whether they bring plagues and punishments from afar or meet face to face with a hero to advise or rebuke him, their presence is undeniable and inescapable. I will discuss first the role of the gods and the function of the bard in the world of Homer before I analyze these topics in the poems of Hesiod.

The delineation between the world of the gods and the world of men in the Homeric poems is often blurred: events on earth can be traced to both human and divine sources, and the motivations of one side are affected by the interests of or influences from
the other. Human beings do not possess the distinct individuality that characters in later literature, such as Greek tragedy or Platonic dialogues, have. “Individuality” does not refer here simply to one’s personality, since it is clear that heroes such as Odysseus and Achilles display unique personal qualities, but rather to a clearly defined self that is distinguishable and “closed off” from the external world. Modern conceptions of human nature typically identify the body and soul as key elements of a human being, yet neither of these is found as a fully developed concept in the poems of Homer. There is no term that designates the complete and whole human body; as Snell notes, Homer depicts the body as “a mere construct” of independent limbs and organs. The “soul” (ψυχή) plays no part in man’s intellectual capacities or emotions, nor is it presented as the essential element of a man’s self while he is alive, as it is in Plato; rather it appears to be an “alien self” with an unclear and undefined role within the living body, whose full purpose becomes clear once it departs from the body and inhabits Hades as a thoughtless and emotionless image of its former body. The Homeric figure thinks and feels with the organs present in his body: the φρήν, νόος, and θυμός.

This aggregate nature of man is open to outside influence, particularly from the gods. Consequently the external and internal qualities of men are not consistent or independent, but are often affected by divine manipulation. The physical appearance of

79 Snell 1953, 5-7. The term σῶμα, the common term for the whole body in later literature, means “corpse” in Homer.

80 Though the ψυχή is a necessary component of a living being (for when it departs from the body, the man is dead), it does not appear to have any bearing on a man’s personality while he is alive.

81 Rohde 1966, 1-8; cf. Od. 11, esp. 139-154, where Odysseus must provide a corporeal element (the blood) for the ψυχαί in order to interact with them as intellectually and emotionally capable beings, and not just drifting shades. Odysseus’ mother does not recognize him until she has consumed the blood (153).

82 Cf. Snell 1953, 8-15 for a discussion on the complex and overlapping relationship between the latter two organs.
Odysseus in the *Odyssey* frequently changes in accordance with his purposes and designs: at some times it is to his benefit to appear ragged and destitute in order convince others that he is a lowly beggar; at other times he needs to reveal himself as a glorious hero. These changes in appearance are usually marked by the intervention of Athena, who can either enhance his form by making him taller and more handsome (8.229-235, 16.172-176) or mar his attractiveness by causing his skin to wrinkle and his hair to fall out (13.429-438).

The thoughts and feelings of the Homeric characters are equally susceptible to divine influence. The gods are often assigned responsibility for particularly stupid behavior; for example, Glaucus engages in an uneven trade with Diomedes because Zeus “took away his wits.” (*Il.* 6.234). Similarly, when characters disagree with the opinions of another they occasionally claim that “the gods have destroyed his wits.” (*Il.* 7.360, 12.234; *Od.* 14.178). The gods can also implant courage (ἄροσος, *Od.* 3.76), anger (ἀληχόν τε κακόν τε ἡμῶν, *Il.* 9.635-636), and “vital energy” (μένος, *Il.* 5.125) into human beings. It is often difficult, then, to separate an individual’s own thoughts, feelings, and motivations from the interference of the gods; even in cases where a particular consideration or motive would seem perfectly natural, Homer often offers a divine machination to explain it. A god, often in disguise, can entice a human character to commit a particular act through

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83 Dodds 1951, 8-11.

84 Snell (1953, 30-31) cites Achilles’ restraint, which Homer ascribes to Athena’s intervention, in *Il.* 1.194-222, although he was already deliberating his course of action prior to her appearance in 188-193 and could have, if the poet so chose, opted not to draw his sword.
persuasive speech; Athena, appearing as Lycaon, convinces Pandarus to launch an arrow at Menelaus by appealing to his desire for glory and gifts (κῦδος, ἀγλαὰ δῶρα) and thus persuades his foolish mind (τῷ δὲ φρένας ἄφρονι πεῖθεν, Il. 4.92-104). Voegelin aptly summarizes the significance of the divine influence on human behavior:

For the rest, the transhuman elements of the order of being penetrate so deeply into man or, from the other side, man is yet so imperfectly closed as a self-conscious, reflecting agent, that the status of various phenomena as human or divine must remain in doubt and, in particular, that quite frequently it will not be certain to what extent the actions of man are his actions at all. 85

The susceptibility of men’s thoughts and decisions to divine interference reveals the vast extent of the gods’ influence over human behavior.

While the gods possess the power to manipulate human thought and appearance, their own motivations and concerns are closely tied to mortal characters. Although men cannot actively tamper with the gods’ physical, intellectual, or emotional capacities, the gods are nonetheless portrayed as serving human causes and interests. Achilles cannot manipulate Zeus directly by either interfering with his internal operations or personally confronting him; instead, he pleads with his divine mother, who in turn supplicates Zeus (Il. 351-527). Though he knows fulfilling the wishes of Achilles and Thetis will cause conflict with Hera, Zeus assents to their wishes and promises to help the Trojans. As Hephaestus warns in Il. 1.573-575, quarrels amongst the gods for the sake of humans can cause ruin; and yet throughout the Iliad the gods fight with each other, often causing each other intense misery, for the sake of mortal interests. Although their powers far exceed those of human characters, the gods typically use those powers to help or hurt persons and groups within the mortal world. Furthermore, the events in the divine sphere are

85 Voegelin 1957, 103.
revealed and detailed only insofar as they explain events and consequences in the human world. As Snell notes, “The human action does not serve a higher, a divine cause, but quite the reverse: the story of the gods contains only so much as is needed to make happenings on earth intelligible.”

The narrative subordinates divine events to human events, inasmuch as the former almost always provide some explanation for the causes and outcomes of human affairs.

The human and divine worlds are further confused by Homer’s depictions of anthropomorphic gods and godlike humans. The gods have bodies comparable to those of human beings: they have knees, chins, arms, hands, bellies, and heads with brows and hair. They furthermore are involved in the same activities and relationships that humans are. Zeus and Hera are married, Ares and Aphrodite commit infidelity (Od.8.266-366), and the gods sleep (Il.14.352-353) and have feasts (Il.1.601-604). Even when Homer attempts to distinguish divine from mortal, the differences are often superficial. The gods, despite their immortal status, can be injured; when Diomedes, with the aid of Athena, attacks Aphrodite, Homer notes:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ῥέε } & \text{ δ’ ἄμβροτον αἷμα θεοῖο} \\
& \text{ἰχώρ, οἷος πέρ τε ἦς εἰς καρκίσσας θεοῖν·} \\
& \text{οὐ γὰρ σίτον ἔδουσ’, οὐ πίνουσ’ αἰδίοιαν,} \\
& \text{τούλιν’ ἀναίμονές εἰσι καὶ αἰθάναιτο καλέονται. (Il. 5.339-342)}
\end{align*}
\]

Homer differentiates immortal wounds by observing that the gods do not spill mortal blood, but rather divine ἰχώρ. He explains this phenomenon by noting that the gods do not eat food or drink wine. It seems natural that divine beings would not need to consume anything, inasmuch as they are immortals and should not need sustenance. Yet Homer

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86 Snell 1953, 37.

does not say that the gods do not eat or drink, but rather he depicts them consuming their own brand of food and drink, ambrosia and nectar (*Od*. 5.92-93). Despite their immortality and life of ease (ἡεία ζωοντες), the gods are still susceptible to injuries and possess desire (θυμός) for divine sustenance (*Il*. 1.602).

What then are the fundamental differences between gods and men in Homer’s poetry? The gods are immortal (ἀθάνατοι, αἰὲν ἐόντες), more powerful than men (θεοὶ δέ τε φέρτεροι ἄνδρῶν, *Il*. 21.264), capable of accomplishing everything (θεοὶ δέ τε πάντα δύνανται, *Od*. 10.306), and have complete knowledge (θεοὶ δέ τε πάντα ἴσασιν, *Od*. 4.379). While the first three qualities are straightforward, Homer’s conception of divine omniscience requires some explanation. The gods do not seem to possess an innate understanding of everything by virtue of their divine nature, but rather obtain knowledge through sense perception, particularly sight. Because of his absence from Olympus (*Od*. 1.22-26), Poseidon does not immediately know that the other gods have planned to assist the homecoming of Odysseus, but, upon his return from the Ethiopians, he sees Odysseus sailing (ἴδεν, εἴσατο) and realizes that the gods have altered their plans during his absence (*Od*. 5.282-290). The gods nonetheless are often depicted as all-knowing because they have the capacity to see all things; the Muses, for example, know all because they are constantly present (πάρεστε), while humans, who can neither see as far as the gods nor travel as easily, must rely on reports alone (κλέος ὄλον ἄκοομεν) and therefore do not have complete knowledge (*Il*. 485-486). As Snell observes, the “uncomplicated views which he holds concerning knowledge always apply in the same stable ratio: the wider the experience, the greater the knowledge.”

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88 Snell 1953, 137.
mortals do, by witnessing things directly, but they have the ability to see and experience beyond the limitations of human perception and experience.

These limitations include temporal as well as spatial boundaries; humans cannot observe or know the future, whereas gods such as Proteus (Od. 4.561-569), Circe (Od. 12.37-141), and Thetis (Il. 1.415-418) have a clearer understanding of what fate and the future hold for each hero; even humans who have a close relationship with the gods, such as Calchas,89 are described as knowing “the things that are, that will be, and that were before” (τὰ τ’ ἐόντα τὰ τ’ ἐσσόμενα πρὸ τ’ ἐόντα, Il. 1.70). The gods have a knowledge that is not bound by temporal limitations and can communicate such knowledge to select mortals, like Calchas, who can in turn express these divine revelations to other humans.

Before discussing humans endowed with access to this divine knowledge, including poets as well as seers, I will first discuss the general phenomenon of divine communication with mortals in the Homeric poems.

**Divine Communication**

There are several avenues through which the gods can communicate with humans. Personal interaction with humans occurs fairly regularly. The gods disclose their divine identities to some heroes, such as Odysseus, Menelaus, and Achilles, while for others they appear only in disguise; as Odysseus notes, it is difficult even for a knowledgeable man to recognize the gods because of their tendency to change shape (Od. 13.312-313). The gods also communicate with mortals through dreams. Agamemnon and Penelope both experience dreams of divine significance. Zeus deliberately sends a destructive dream (οὖλον ὄνειρον) to Agamemnon in order to fulfill the promise he made to Achilles

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89 Calchas is not only an expert at reading omens, but also has received his skill from Apollo himself (Il. 1.68-72).
Thetis (II. 2.5-40). While the meaning of Penelope’s dream, that Odysseus will return and kill the suitors, is clear to her, she is unaware of the precise source of her dream. She notes that it could have come from either the gate of fulfillment or the gate of deception, whereas Odysseus recognizes the dream as a true omen presaging the destruction of the suitors (Od. 19.535-569). This episode reveals that not all people can recognize signals from the gods with equal skill; some people are better able to identify the meanings of omens and dreams.  

When the gods communicate with someone who has experience and skill interpreting the world of the divine, such as a seer, the process of communication is more complicated than it is in the previous models. Agamemnon’s dream contains a speech that makes plain to him the will of the gods, but seers often interpret omens that are not so immediately understandable. Theoclymenus observes a bird omen, a hawk grasping a dove, and can glean from this portent that the authority of Telemachus’ family is safe (Od. 15.525-534). When Theoclymenus reports this omen to Penelope, he contradicts Telemachus’ claim that Odysseus is confined on the island of Calypso; Telemachus has no clear knowledge (οὐ σάφα οἶδεν), but the seer can accurately (ἄτρεκέως) prophesy Odysseus’ presence in Ithaca through his interpretation of the bird omen (Od. 17.152-161).  

Seers are capable of understanding more nuanced forms of divine communication.
and can offer a more accurate account of events because of their ability to read omens ambiguous to those unskilled in prophecy.

The skill and power of the prophets is not limited to discerning perceptible yet ambiguous signs; they also have to the power to receive divine messages internally, without any explicit outward omen. After Apollo and Athena have decided that Hector should challenge one of the Achaeans, they reveal and pursue their plan through the seer Helenus:

\[
\text{τῶν δ’ Ἐλευθέρων φίλος παῖς σύνεστο Ἡμῖν}
\text{βουλήν, ή δὲ Ἁλεξίδος εὑρίσκονε ἐπιτύγχανεν};
\text{στῇ δὲ παρ’ Ἐκτορ’ ἴών καὶ μὴν πρὸς μῆδον ἔσσεν}.\]

... ὡς γὰρ ἐγὼ ἀκούσα θεῶν αἰειγενετάων. (II. 7.44-46, 53)

Helenus understands the gods’ plan in his heart (σύνεστο Ἡμῖν), but it is unclear how their will was expressed to him; the dialogue between Apollo and Athena at an oak tree near Pergamos (22-43) seems to have taken place apart from humans, but Helenus claims to have heard their voice (ἀκούσα θεῶν αἰειγενετάων). Leaf and Bayfield point out that Helenus “hears” the gods’ counsel “not by the outward ear, but by an inward inspiration, as being a soothsayer.”\(^{92}\) Seers then can receive and understand divine signals without an obvious outward manifestation.

**Poetic Truth and Authority**

I have discussed the pervasive presence of gods in Homer’s world, the various types of divine communication with mortals, and the existence of figures with skill and experience in receiving and interpreting messages from the gods. What then is the function of the poet? What relationship does he have with the immortal gods and how do they communicate with him? What kind of truth can he offer to his audience and from

\(^{92}\) Leaf and Bayfield 1965 ad 44.
where does he derive his authority? I will argue that poets, like seers, possess a particular expertise and a method of receiving divine communication: they can formally express knowledge acquired through inspiration from the Muses. The poets can access the knowledge of the Muses and deliver an accurate account of events. But the truth of their account is not limited to historical veracity; rather it is evaluated by its accordance with order (κατὰ κόσμον), which can include a number of qualities, including aesthetic beauty, accuracy, and propriety. The poet who can deliver this type of truth is highly respected by his audience; the authority of his account is derived both from his special relationship with the Muses as well as from a universally recognized social authority based on the prestige of his position.

The relationship between the poet and Muses is based on two distinct types of divine influence: the Muses both teach the poet the skill of reciting poetry and through inspiration provide specific content for the bard to sing. Murray notes that though Homer himself does not draw a strong distinction between these two modes of influence, nonetheless the presence of two types is evident: “The one – poetic inspiration – accounts for poetic creativity in terms of a temporary visitation from some external force; the other in terms of permanent qualities inherent in the poet.”

Murray labels “poetic genius,” is evident in the introduction of Demodocus:

\[ \text{τῷ γάρ ὁ θεὸς περὶ δώκεν ἀοιδὴν.} \]
\[ \text{τέρπειν, ὡπετὴ ὑμὸς ἐποτόγυνην ἄειδεν. (Od. 8.44-45)} \]

The god has given Demodocus ἀοιδή, which here indicates the ability to perform pleasing songs as his heart bids him (ὡπετὴ ὑμὸς ἐποτόγυνην ἄειδεν). While this element of the

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93 Murray 1981, 89.

94 As Walsh (1984, 10 notes), ἀοιδή can also be used for a specific song, as it is in Od. 8.499.
bard’s relationship with the Muses is significant, it does not seem to differ much from other skills conferred on mortals by the gods. For example, Hector notes that the gods bestow (ἐδωκε) a variety of abilities upon humans, including singing (ἀοιδήν), dancing (ἀρχηγοτώ), and military prowess (πολεμήια ἔγα, Il.13.730-735). What is the nature of the divine influence on the contents of the song?

Poetic inspiration from the Muses is mentioned when the poet is requesting specific information concerning particular stories, events, or characters; the bard will occasionally pause to ask the Muse questions such as who was the first Achaean to win bloody spoils (Il.14.508-510) or how fire first fell on the Greek ships (Il. 16.112-113).\(^{95}\)

The invocation to the Muses at the beginning of the catalogue of ships in Book 2 of the Iliad reveals much about the nature of poetic inspiration:

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"Εσπετε νῦν μοι Μοῦσαι Ὄλυμπια δύματ' ἔχουσαι:
ήμεις γὰρ θεάι ἐστέ πάρεστε τε ἵστε τε πάντα,
ήμεις δὲ κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν οἴδε τι ιδμὲν;
οἱ τινες ἡγεμόνες Δαναῶν καὶ κοίραι τε θησαν;
πληξόν ὑ' οὐκ ἦν ἄτ' χὼν μην ἀνέθυμοι οὐδ' ὁμοφήνων,
οἶδ' ε' μοι δέκα μὲν γλώσσαι, δέκα δὴ στόματ' εἶεν,
φωνὴ δ' ἄρρηκτος, χάλκεον δὲ μοι ἄτοπο ἐνείη.
εἰ μὴ Ὄλυμπιάδες Μοῦσαι Διὸς αἰγιόχοι
ὑγιατέρες μνησαίας' ὦσιν ὑπὸ Ἰλιον ἠλίθων;
ἀρχοὺς αὖ νηῶν ἐρέω νῆάς τε προπάσας. (Il. 2.484-493)
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The Muses are goddesses with complete knowledge (ἵστε τε πάντα) that is based on omnipresence (πάρεστε) whom the poet relies on because he, as a human, hears only rumor and knows nothing (κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν οἴδε τι ιδμὲν). Without access to this divine knowledge, the poet claims he would unable to fulfill the vast task of naming all the Achaean leaders; even if he had an augmented body and superhuman vocal capacities (μοι δέκα μὲν γλώσσαι, δέκα δὴ στόματ' εἶεν) and a stout heart (χάλκεον δὲ μοι ὄτος), those

\(^{95}\) Cf. Pratt 1993, 22-23.
powers would be useless without the proper knowledge and memory (μνησαία) provided by the Muses. Homer’s description of poetic inspiration is, as Murray argues, essentially based on the transmission of knowledge and information, with little emphasis on the style or structure of the language.96

The communication of information from Muses to the poet is thus very similar to Helenus’ perception of the will of Athena and Apollo; the bard receives messages internally (i.e. no outward manifestation is evident to the audience), and he can incorporate this information into his poetry. He is not simply a passive mouthpiece of the gods, as Plato suggests in Ion 533e3-535a2, but has agency in shaping the words after he has received the messages; although his “poetic genius” and skill may ultimately derive from a divine source, he may use his poetic gift according to his own discretion. The influence of the Muses, including both teaching and inspiration, seems to be a sine qua non in the poetic process, rather than its entirety. The story of Thamyris (Il. 2.594-600) supports this observation. Thamyris boasts that he can defeat the Muses in a singing competition and they, in anger, take away his ability to sing (ἀοιδὴν ἔσωσον ἀφέλοντο) and make him forget his former skill in lyre playing (ἐκλέλαθον κιθαριστύν); in doing so, the Muses show that they have the power to stop the poetic process (παῦσαν ἀοιδῆς) as well as inspire it.

The poet is able to communicate the information he has received from the Muses to his audience, but it is not immediately obvious how these listeners interpret the content of his poem: how do they evaluate the truth-value of a poem and for what reason do they accept the bard as an authority on the gods and the distant age of heroes? I will first

examine how Homer presents the relationship between truth and poetry and then I will look at his conception of poetic authority.

Memory is one feature of poetic truth that has received much critical attention; the Muses are described as reminding (μνησαίαθ, II. 2.492) the bard, or making him forget (II. 2.600), and ἀληθείη, one of the predominant terms for truth in Homer and later authors, is etymologically connected with the term for forgetting, λήθη (ἀ - λήθη, “not forgetting”). Detienne argues that the concept of poetic truth ultimately depends on memory. He claims that the function of memory in poetry is not limited to mnemonic techniques of composition and that the combination of Muses and memory “confers on the Aletheia of poetry its true, deep meaning.” 97 In this configuration of truth, the poet is not offering thoughts and accounts that can be independently verified; the poet sings about topics and events far removed from the audience both spatially and temporally. The contents of these poems do not evoke the personal memories and experiences of the audience but rather, as Detienne notes, the shared cultural stories, practices, and institutions that make up the “mythical thought” of Homer’s time. 98 By citing the Muses as his immediate source, the poet can both preserve these communal memories and confer upon them “a religious power that gave poetic pronouncements their status of magicoreligious speech.” 99 The bard’s truth is thus not subject to the same scrutiny as modern scientific propositions are since it is endowed with a divine source and is based on the common cultural heritage of his listeners. Poetic truth is simultaneously near and


99 Detienne 1996, 43.
remote; while the stories themselves are far removed from the world of the poet and his audience, the Muses provide a direct and clear link to the memory of these events.

Several scholars, however, have criticized attempts to interpret truth and memory as equivalent in epic poetry. Adkins notes that Homer uses ἀληθείη in situations where memory has little significance. For example, Telemachus remarks that he would rather speak the truth (ἐμοὶ φίλ᾽ ἀληθέα μυθήσασθαι) than burden himself by taking the beggar Odysseus with him (Od. 17.12-15); truth here refers to honest disclosure rather than polite dissembling. Adkins further notes that Homer is fully capable of representing truth as an “ordinary-language” concept similar to modern notions: “True statements about present events which fall within the experience of the person making them have the same relation to ‘the facts’ in any society, literate or non-literate, and are confirmable in the same manner.” Pratt adds that ἀληθείη and related words are never explicitly used to describe the truth-value of poetry or of divine speech. These terms typically indicate the truth or falsity of a character’s speech: a true account is one that is “straightforward and sincere,” while a false one is either deliberately misleading or factually incorrect. The poet does not then present the same truth (ἀληθείη) that the ordinary characters in his poems are capable of revealing, concealing, and discovering.

What language then does Homer use to describe the truth-value of poetry? While the poet does not use ἀληθείη to describe his own work, he does depict a bard whose poems have a definite truth-value. Demodocus sings several tales for the Phaeacians and

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100 Adkins 1972, 6-7.
101 Adkins 1972, 12.
102 Pratt 1993, 22.
Odysseus, including one about a quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus (*Od*. 8.72-82).

Odysseus praises Demodocus by saying:

Δημόδοκ', ἐξοχα δὴ σὲ βροτῶν αἰνίζωμ' ἀπάντην·
ἡ σὲ τε Μοῦσ' ἔδιδαξε· Διὸς πάϊς, ἢ σὲ γ' Ἀπόλλων'
λὴν γὰρ κατὰ κόσμον Ἀχαιῶν ἀνίου ἀξίως,
ὡς' ἐξεώ τ' ἐπαινῶν τ' καὶ ὅσο' ἐμάγησαν Ἀχαιοί,
ὡς τ' ποι ᾗ αὐτός παρεῖν ἢ ἄλλου ἀκούσας. (*Od*. 8.487-491)

Odysseus is in a unique position to judge the song of Demodocus; unlike the Phaeacians, he was present at the events detailed in the bard’s song.¹⁰³ Odysseus praises the poet by claiming that he sang “very much according to order” (λίην...κατὰ κόσμον ). In this passage “according to order” connotes accuracy; Demodocus sings of the toils of the Achaeans “as if he himself were present” (ὡς τ' ποι ᾗ αὐτός παρεῖν ). Poetry and the Muses are connected with experiential knowledge: both here and in the Catalogue of Ships the notion of presence (πάρεστε, παρεών) is connected with knowledge and accuracy. The overlap in this passage between the actual presence of Odysseus and the virtual presence of Demodocus and the Muses is evaluated in terms of order; though Odysseus could have called Demodocus’ poem ἀληθής, inasmuch it is in accordance with his own experience, he instead expresses the truth of his account by praising its accordance with order.

The phrase κατὰ κόσμον has a broad semantic range beyond historical accuracy.¹⁰⁴ Unlike ἀληθής, the use of κατὰ κόσμον is not generally limited to speech; the same phrase

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¹⁰³ Hartog (2000, 389-392) discusses this anomaly as one of the key developments in the origin of history, namely the “discovery of historicity.”

¹⁰⁴ The phrase κατὰ μοῖραν is often closely associated with κατὰ κόσμον. Walsh (1984, 17-19) distinguishes the two, arguing that κατὰ κόσμον connotes telling things in the proper order, while κατὰ μοῖραν suggests giving each part of the story its due. Pratt (1993, 85) interprets the two as synonymous phrases with ethical and aesthetic connotations. While there are some instances where the phrases have identical meanings, as when Euryalus’ disrespect for Odysseus is said to be acting neither κατὰ κόσμον (*Od*. 8.179) nor κατὰ μοῖραν (*Od*. 8.397), I will concentrate primarily on κατὰ κόσμον because of its prominence in Odysseus’ evaluation of the bard Demodocus.
is used to indicate the proper arrangement of arms (Il. 10.472) and orderly reining in of horses (Il. 11.48), as well as the disorderly (οὐ κατὰ κόσμον) and rash manner in which the sons of Atreus summon an assembly at night instead of at daybreak (Od. 3.138). In these examples, the phrase “according to order” refers to an established type of behavior that is both aesthetically pleasing (the arms are both καλά and arranged εὖ κατὰ κόσμον, Il. 10.472) and socially beneficial (the disorderly nature of the assembly results in schism, Od. 3.149-150). There are also ethical dimensions of κατὰ κόσμον: Zeus threatens the other gods with physical abuse, treatment that goes against their dignity (οὐ κατὰ κόσμον, Il. 8.12).

The concern for propriety and respect for the social status of others occasionally comes into conflict with the desire to present the truth accurately. Thersites has a tendency to quarrel improperly (ἔπεα ἄκοσμα, οὐ κατὰ κόσμον) with kings (Il. 2.213-214). The content of his attack against Agamemnon, however, is not essentially different from the speech of Achilles, instead, his fault is, as Pratt notes, “excessive honesty; (he has) said things that were better left unsaid.” Odysseus confirms that it is the impropriety of this speech that is so reproachable:


Although κατὰ κόσμον can refer to accurate information (Od. 8.489), it can also suggest the proper withholding of true information to avoid impropriety. Adkins creates the

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105 e.g. Il. 1.355-356 and 2.239-240; 1.232 and 2.242.

106 Pratt 1993, 87-88.

107 Although Odysseus does mention that Thersites speaks of things that no one yet knows (252-253), his position as worst Greek soldier at Troy indicates that he is in no place to make any comment that violates the dignity and status of the kings.
following formulation: if a speech violates the excellence (ἀρετή) of a chieftain or socially important character (ἄγαθός), then it cannot be considered κατὰ κόσμον, regardless of its truth-value; if the speech does not violate anyone’s ἀρετή, then it is κατὰ κόσμον to tell the truth, and the term κατὰ κόσμον can be used to characterize an account as true.\textsuperscript{108}

The conflict between presenting the truth and maintaining social propriety can be explained more clearly by differentiating the particular types of order (κόσμος) that are operative in the recitation of a poem. Walsh proposes three separate types of κόσμος: the order and shape of the poem itself, the congruity of the poem with “the way things are” (i.e. accuracy), and the congruity of the poem with social order (i.e. propriety).\textsuperscript{109} These aspects of order do occasionally conflict: although Thersites’ rebuke is a violation of social order, it is not necessarily inaccurate nor is it inelegant (λίγύς περ ἐὼν ἀγορητής, II. 2.246). There are, however, many instances where they overlap. For example, Alcinous contrasts the “shape” of Odyseus’ words (μορφὴ ἐπέων) and his bard-like skill (ὡς ὅτ’ ἀοιδὸς ἐπισταμένως κατέλεξας) with the behavior of liars and cheats, suggesting that a well ordered speech is also likely to be an accurate one (Od. 11.363-369). Walsh also notes the connection between these two types of order:

If song’s “shape” (morphe) and its order (kosmos) are similar qualities, and if verbal “shape” depends on truth, kosmos in the song and kosmos of the world should not differ. The song viewed as an articulation of parts stands for one viewed as a representation of serially ordered facts.\textsuperscript{110}

If the speaker has a reliable and true account that he wishes to present, it is likely that the order and shape of his speech will reflect the truth of its contents; the false claims of

\textsuperscript{108} Adkins 1972, 15-17.
\textsuperscript{109} Walsh 1984, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{110} Walsh 1984, 9.
dissembling beggars are evident because they do not possess the same shape nor
demonstrate the same skill as the account of Odysseus. Alcinous’ judgment is not, as a
modern reader might expect, primarily based on the plausibility of the story’s content:
Odysseus’ tale is full of fantastic elements, yet its formal qualities as well as his own skill
add credibility to the account; the stories of liars, however, do not bear the same
attributes, and Alcinous concludes that they fashion lies “whence one could not see” (ὅθεν
κέ τις οὐδὲ ἴδοιτο, Od. 11.366). The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* contains another instance
where the structure of a speech reflects its accuracy. Hermes recites the births of the gods
all in order (πάντ’ ἐνέπων κατὰ κόσμον, 433); while in its immediate context this refers to
the accurate sequential listing of gods by age (κατὰ πρέσβιν, 431), Apollo reacts to the
beauty (ἐρατόν, 455) and craft (τέχνη, 447) of the poem.

The accuracy of a speech is also closely related to its propriety. Although the
example of Thersites illustrates how these values can be in conflict, there are also
situations in which what is inappropriate is also untrue. This is evident in the quarrel
between Odysseus and Euryalus in *Odyssey* 8. When the Phaeacian Euryalus taunts
Odysseus by claiming that he looks more like a merchant than an athlete, Odysseus
replies that he is speaking out of order (οὐ κατὰ κόσμον, 179). In this case Euryalus is
speaking inappropriately by insulting a stranger; Odysseus contrasts him, a handsome
man with little sense, with someone who speaks with gentle respect (αἴδοι μειλιχίῃ, 172)
and good form (μορφήν, 170). Here the μορφή of the speaker’s words indicates not only
that it is a genuine and honest speech, but also that the speaker is a modest and respected
character. Pratt adds that “speech is admired not merely for its formal properties or for its

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111 Merry (1961 *ad loc.*) notes that this phrase can be interpreted two ways: it can either mean “from things which don’t admit proof” (ὅθεν = ἐκ τοιούτων ἄ) or “(pushing falsehoods to a point) from which no man can so much as see (sc. that they are false)” (ὅθεν = ἐκεῖσε ὅθεν).
truthfulness, but for the way it reveals the good character of the speaker.”\footnote{Pratt 1993, 87.}
Euryalus’ taunting is brazen and uncouth, but it is also inaccurate: Odysseus easily wins the discus throwing contest, and boasts that he can excel in all other competitions except for the footrace (187-234). Although Pratt argues that Euryalus is being honest by openly admitting what he thinks,\footnote{Pratt 1993, 86-7. She compares Euryalus’ taunting here to Telemachus’ bluntness in Od. 17.5-15.} Euryalus clearly fails to speak either accurately or appropriately by insinuating that Odysseus is weak; Odysseus’ ἀρετή is not only a matter of social propriety, but also a real and publicly acknowledged quality that he can demonstrate at will.

The truth of the poet is thus a type of order that often accurately reflects the historical truth, but is also inextricably tied to the aesthetic shape and arrangement of the poem as well as the standards of social propriety. The poet is in many ways a preserver of order: he accurately chronicles historical events and characters,\footnote{As in the invocation to the catalogue of ships Il. 2.484-493.} his pleasing song often calms his listeners and creates a peaceful atmosphere after a quarrel has ended,\footnote{E.g. Apollo and Muses in Il. 1.603-604, Demodocus in Od. 8.254-369.} and by singing he helps promote the appropriate fame and glory due to gods and men.\footnote{As Penelope notes in Od. 1.338.}

Through his poem the poet reveals himself to be a figure much like the eloquent and modest speaker described by Odysseus (Od. 8.166-179): his graceful, appropriate, and accurate speech earns him respect from his audience.

The authority of the poet seems to depend on the same qualities and standards that characterize his poem as κατὰ κόσμον: the ability to compose pleasing, informative, and
appropriate songs. While a successful poem will incorporate all of these elements, scholars have debated which quality is ultimately the most important. Detienne suggests a fundamental connection between truth (ἀληθείη) and poetry;\textsuperscript{117} Pratt argues that there is more emphasis on the aesthetic qualities of beauty and pleasure than on truth.\textsuperscript{118} I have discussed above the limitations of ἀληθείη in Homer’s work: the term seems to designate the “ordinary language” concept of truth\textsuperscript{119} and is not used anywhere to describe the truth-value of poetry. The significance of beauty and pleasure, however, has not yet been explored. Pratt argues that Odysseus is a model for the primacy of aesthetic qualities over accuracy in the poetic process.\textsuperscript{120} Odysseus is an expert at crafting lies that resemble the truth, such as the story he tells Eumaeus about an encounter he had with Odysseus and the hero’s trick that brought him a cloak (Od. 14.462-506). Eumaeus seems to accept this story as genuine (οὐδὲ τί πω παρὰ μοῖραν ἐπος νηκεβδές ἐειπες, 509) and is pleased by it. Athena, unlike Eumaeus, is able to recognize Odysseus’ lie to her (Od. 13.256-286), but she nonetheless is pleased by his cunning (μείδησεν, 287). Pratt concludes from these and the other instances of Odysseus’ false tales:

The Odyssey, with its depiction of Odysseus’ lies, warns us against assuming that all credible tales, knowledgeably shaped, are true. It may be natural to deduce truth from coherence or credibility, but the Odyssey shows itself well aware that the skill of the liar depends on creating this same semblance, this same appearance of truth.”\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{117} Detienne 1996, 39-52.

\textsuperscript{118} Pratt 1993, 55-94.

\textsuperscript{119} Adkins 1972, 12.

\textsuperscript{120} Pratt 1993, 67-73; 85-94.

\textsuperscript{121} Pratt 1993, 69.
Poetic accounts are similarly, according to Pratt, to be evaluated primarily by their ability to please rather than by their accuracy.

There are several qualifications to this view of poetry. First, as Pratt concedes, a story can contain truth without necessarily preserving accurately “what actually happened.” For example, the story Odysseus tells to Eumaeus reflects Odysseus’ character as a generous and cunning man, even if its surface details are fictional.\textsuperscript{122} Furthermore, the beauty and pleasure of a poem are not usually qualities distinct from and superior to its truth and accuracy. Often the poem pleases and enchants the listener by offering wisdom and divine knowledge. The Sirens, for example, enchant (\textit{Σέλιγουσι}, \textit{Od.} 12.40) men with their song because it contains extensive knowledge (\textit{Od.} 12.189-191), not simply because it is aesthetically pleasing. Similarly, when Odysseus charms Alcinous and the Phaeacians (where there is little indication that he is being deceptive), the graceful form of his words (\textit{μορφὴ ἔπεων}, \textit{Od.} 11.367) is as much an indication of the honesty of his account as a product of his skill.\textsuperscript{123} The poet’s authority and approval are not then independent of his ability to present accurate and truthful information; rather, the poetic conception of truth is a fundamental part of the \kostos of the poem.

Although the ability to speak \kata\kostos is a token of the bard’s credibility, his authority is never doubted and rarely questioned in the poem; there are no disorderly bards in Homer’s work with whom Demodocus and Phemius can be contrasted. The poet possesses a widely accepted position of honor and respect. While the presence of

\textsuperscript{122} Pratt 1993, 89.

\textsuperscript{123} Von Reden 1995, 36 situates the relationship between truth and charm in terms of the guest-host relationship: “…while the singer needed the hospitality of a feasting community, he provided the knowledge on which society rested. The enchantment caused by his song brought the two interests together.”
Odysseus, an eyewitness to the events detailed in Demodocus’ song, affirms the poet’s accuracy, there are no skeptics in his audience, nor is there any doubt that he can summon the divine knowledge of the Muses. The poet’s position of honor is recognized by the other characters in Homer’s work: Demodocus is honored by the Phaeacians (λαοῖσι τετιμένον, *Od.* 8.472) and by Odysseus, who claims that poets obtain honor through their relationship with the Muses (*Od.* 8.479-481); Eumaeus describes bards as welcome strangers because of the pleasing songs they offer (*Od.* 17.385); Telemachus twice defends Phemius – once when Penelope protests the choice of song (*Od.* 1.346-359) and later when Phemius begs for his life in front of Odysseus (*Od.* 22.356-360). It is clear from these examples that the whole class of poets, not just Demodocus and Phemius in particular, is being honored. Odysseus does not insinuate that Demodocus possesses a unique power, but rather he associates him with the class of bards who are loved by the Muses (ἀφίλος δὲ φυλον ἀοιδῶν, *Od.* 8.481); Odysseus promises to tell all men that god has given Demodocus θέσπις ἀοιδή (*Od.* 8.497-498), while Eumaeus’ general description of a bard is θέσπις ἀοιδός (*Od.* 17.385).

The poet’s authority is affirmed by the audience’s reaction while he is singing. They listen silently and attentively in a state of enchanted wonder at the song (*Od.* 1.325-326). The poem marks a period of calm and order, especially after a quarrel. Rarely does anyone interrupt the poet while he is singing; when they do, it is because the subject of the song resonates with the personal experience of an audience member, as when Phemius sings of the return of the Greek heroes from Troy within Penelope’s

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124 Phemius’ songs are called ἰλὴτήρια in *Od.* 1.337. Cf. also the Phaeacians’ rapt attention to Odysseus’ tale in *Od.* 11.333-334.

125 e.g. Apollo and Muses in *Il.* 1.603-604, Demodocus in *Od.* 8.254-369.
hearing (Od. 1.328-344) or when Demodocus inadvertently relates to Odysseus the story of his quarrel with Achilles (Od. 8.72-103). As Walsh observes, the bard’s song typically “calls upon nothing in the listener’s own experience or knowledge, and it discourages active judgment and interpretation.”

The audience does not and cannot challenge the authority of the poet because the content of his song is beyond their experience and beyond the truth-value of ordinary speech. Pratt argues that Athena’s amused recognition of Odysseus’ lies (Od. 13.287-295) provides a model for the proper reaction of the audience: “a failure to believe it, but amusement and even pleasure at the cleverness of the author.” The audience, however, is not in the same position as Athena: they cannot know whether the content of these songs is accurate, but instead must rely on the authority of a divine bard.

The separation between the content of the poem and the world of the listeners is similar to the distance between the poet himself and his audience: bards are presented as strangers without attachment to a particular house (Od. 17.385); Demodocus’ poetic grace comes at the expense of his sight, so that the wisdom and knowledge found in his poetry ultimately stem from this divine source rather than personal experience (Od. 8.63-64). The special status of the poet and his divine source confer upon his poem an authority that is beyond question for his audience. As Detienne argues:

The poet’s speech never solicits agreement from its listeners or assent from a social group, no more than does a king of justice: it is deployed with all the majesty of oracular speech. It does not attempt to gather force from human approval or disagreement...It is not the manifestation of an individual’s will or thought, nor does it constitute the expression of any

126 Walsh 1984, 14.
127 Pratt 1993, 72.
particular agent or individual. It is the attribute and privilege of a social function.128

The truth and authority of the poet are not questioned or challenged because he, like a seer, can access a divine source and present information that is unverifiable to the audience. The bard’s song is not, then, evaluated in terms of verifiable truth (ἀληθείη), but rather is appreciated because of the aesthetic, ethical, and informational order (κόσμος) it contains.

**Divine Deception and Poetic Persona in Hesiod**

Although Hesiod was writing in the same epic tradition as Homer, his poems contain a number of developments in thought and attitude. Since a complete discussion of the differences between these poets is beyond the scope of this paper, I will concentrate on two elements of poetic truth and authority found in Hesiod but not present in Homer: deceptive Muses and the personalized poet. These two features complicate the Homeric concept of the divine bard; while Hesiod makes similar claims to divine inspiration and teachings, he also notes that Muses can mislead poets and is more open than Homer to personal experience as a source for poetic wisdom.

Hesiod does not, like Homer, merely refer obliquely to the divine teachings of the Muses. Instead he vividly describes the beginning of his relationship with these goddesses as a personal encounter. While he is tending his lambs he is approached by them:

"τόνδε δέ με πρώτιστα θεαί πρὸς μύδιν ἔειπον, Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοι· Ποιμένες ἄγραυλοι, κακ' ἐλέγχεα, γαστέρες οἶον, ἴδμεν ψεύδα πολλὰ λέγειν ἑπιμοιοιν ὁμοία, ἴδμεν δ', εὔτ' ἐξέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι. Ὄς ἐφασαν κοῦραι μεγάλου Διὸς ἀρτιέπειαι."

128 Detienne 1996, 75.
καὶ μοι σκῆπτρον ἔδον δάφνης ἐριθηλέος ὀζόν
δρέψασιν, Ὠμητόν· ἐνέπνευσαν δὲ μοι αὐδὴν
ἔστιν, ἵνα κλείσωμεν τὰ τ’ ἐσόμενα πρὸ τ’ ἔόντα.
καὶ μ’ ἐκέλον ὑμαῖν μακάρων γένος αἰὲν ἐόντων,
σφᾶς δ’ αὐτὰς πρῶτόν τε καὶ ὕστατον αἰὲν άζειν. (Th. 24-34)

The dramatic nature of this episode is striking: the careful detail and direct quotation of the Muses “dramatize crudely yet forcefully the reality of the Muses as vital, almost palpable beings.” 129 Hesiod’s world, like Homer’s, includes the undeniable presence of the divine in the physical world. 130 The Muses initiate Hesiod into the world of poetry by breathing divine voice into him (ἐνέπνευσαν δὲ μοι αὐδήν), giving him a staff (σκῆπτρον) which symbolizes his authority concerning the divine, 131 and granting him access to divine knowledge not normally available to mortals (τὰ τ’ ἐσόμενα πρὸ τ’ ἔόντα). While this method of transmitting poetic skill is more vivid than Homer’s description of the process, 132 the effect is the same for both authors: the poet receives both his skill (poetic genius) and his information (poetic inspiration) from the Muses.

Hesiod’s Muses, however, not only serve as sources of poetic truth, but also introduce deception into poetic accounts. Before they confer their gifts upon him, the Muses tell Hesiod that are capable of saying true things (ἄληθεα) as well as lies that resemble true things (ψεύδεα... ἑτύμοιοι ὁμοία). Although there are instances of divine

129 Bradley 1966, 36.

130 Although some have argued that this revelation is either purely a literary convention or a simple metaphor for the sudden appearance of an idea, the attention to dramatic detail seems to suggest that this is presented as a genuine vision. Cf. West 1966 ad 23-34 for a discussion of these alternate interpretations. West also observes that the presence here of typical elements found in other revelatory episodes need not discount Hesiod’s sincerity here: “There are fashions in religious experience, and any vision that he had would naturally assemble itself in accordance with his subconscious expectations and ambitions.”

131 West (1966 ad loc.) notes that the σκῆπτρον is typically possessed by kings, priests, and prophets as a token and symbol of their status as representatives of a god. Hesiod also refers to the poet as an attendant of the Muses (Μουσάων θεράπων, Th. 100).

132 Homer’s Muses usually give (διδόναι, II. 13.730-731, Od. 8.44) or teach (διδάσκειν, Od. 8.481, 488) song to bards.
deception in Homer,\textsuperscript{133} his Muses, as we have seen, consistently provide the bard divine knowledge and the ability to speak κατὰ κόσμον.\textsuperscript{134} The language of Hesiod’s Muses further suggests that their truths and falsehoods are independent of the poem’s aesthetic and ethical qualities; their truth is not based on the broad category of κόσμος, but is expressed in the straightforward opposition of ἀλήθεια and ψεῦδος.\textsuperscript{135} The falsehoods of the Muses are explicitly not true, but they nonetheless appear plausible (ἔτυμοις ὁμοῖα). The formal qualities of poetry are not here indicators of its truth because the false information from the Muses can be transformed into a beautiful and credible song.

The implications of the Muses’ admission are not entirely clear: is Hesiod explaining possible discrepancies between his poetry and his rivals’ by suggesting that other poets have received false information? Or is he warning his audience not to believe everything he says in his own poem? The former option seems more attractive: after Hesiod’s encounter with the goddesses, he is able to sing about “what will be and what has been before” (Th. 32, 38), much like the seer Calchas (Il. 1.70); furthermore, Hesiod claims in the Works and Days that he will say ἔτητυμα (10). Pratt, however, argues that the latter possibility should not be excluded, citing the epithet ἀρτιέπειαι (which has the connotation of deceptive speech in Il. 22.281) as evidence of deliberately enigmatic speech that “the novice poet must solve to be initiated as a poet.”\textsuperscript{136} Though this question

\textsuperscript{133} E.g. The false dream from Zeus which promises to Agamemnon things “not about to be accomplished” (Il. 2.36).

\textsuperscript{134}‘Odysseus’ deceptive storytelling is described in very similar language (ἴσκε ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγων ἔτυμοις ὁμοῖα, Od. 19.203). While Pratt (1993, 63-94) argues that Odysseus here is a symbol of poetic fiction and deception in Homer, Walsh (1984, 20) seems to be more accurate in arguing that Homer “does not explicitly suggest that singers may therefore deceive their audiences, but he has certainly made the inference inevitable for the later tradition.”

\textsuperscript{135} Cf. Adkins 1972, 6-12.
is much debated among contemporary scholars, it is clear that in either case the Muses are cited as the source of falsehoods in poetry. While Hesiod’s encounter with the Muses is presented vividly as a genuine experience, he does not suggest that other poets falsely claim divine inspiration; on the contrary, the Muses apparently provide material to all poets, but they do not always offer accurate information. The audience thus needs to be wary because of the enigmatic nature of divinely inspired song; poets like Hesiod are still endowed with religious authority because of their connection with the Muses and the social symbols of this privileged relationship (σκῆπτρον), but the truth-value of their songs can be complicated by the enigmatic and deceptive nature of the divine signals they receive.

Despite the Muses’ tendency to provide falsehoods, they play a vital role in the order of the world, and the poet is charged with the assignment of interpreting them for humans. The poetry of the Muses is extremely pleasing to its listeners (Th. 39-43), but they do not exist solely to provide entertainment. The soothing presence of the Muses helps princes to resolve public quarrels peacefully and earn the respect of their people (Th. 80-97). The poet, the servant of the Muses, sings about the blessed gods and makes men forget about their sorrows (Th. 99-103). Despite its remoteness from the personal experience of the audience, the content of Hesiod’s Theogony is extremely relevant to his listeners’ understanding of the world. The Theogony describes the development of the universe as it moves from chaotic origins to its justly ordered state under the rule of Zeus. The prevalence of justice is found in both the divine world and the mortal one:

136 Pratt 1993, 110.

137 See Katz and Volk 2000, 122-123 for a recent summary of the two positions.
just as Zeus punishes Prometheus for his deception (Th. 521-525, 613-616), so too Zeus punishes humans for their insolence and cruelty (WD 238-247). The poet is thus able to relate the order and justice found among the gods to the values of his audience. Bradley notes the consequent importance of the poet’s role: “If we were required to single out Hesiod’s most distinctive philosophical and poetic purpose, it would have to be his preoccupation with rendering intelligible to his fellow men the existence of a just and consistent divine will governing all phenomena.”¹³⁹ The poet’s authority is therefore tied to his role as an intermediary between the divine and human worlds; he not only relates the knowledge of the Muses and the will of the gods to men through his song but also shows how the gods and men exist under the same standards of justice.¹⁴⁰

Another important feature of Hesiod’s authority is his poetic personality; unlike Homer, he chooses to avoid anonymity by naming himself in his poetry (Th. 22). One can also glean other personal details from the Theogony and Works and Days:¹⁴¹ Hesiod is a shepherd who resides in a poor town near Mount Helicon (Th. 23), to where his father emigrated from Cyme in order to escape poverty (WD 633-640). The Works and Days is addressed to his brother, Perses, with whom he has had a dispute concerning his father’s inheritance (35-41). These biographical details are part of the personal element of poetic authority not found in Homer; Hesiod’s advice to his brother includes not only divine knowledge communicated to him from the Muses, but also practical wisdom evidently

¹³⁸ Voegelin 1957, 131-133.

¹³⁹ Bradley 1966, 41.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Bradley 1966 for an analysis of the Theogony as a reconciliation between gods and men.

¹⁴¹ For the purpose of this paper it is irrelevant whether these personal details accurately describe the historical Hesiod or are merely part of a contrived persona; in either case, the speaker of the poem presents himself as a distinct personality rather than an anonymous representative of the gods.
derived from personal experience. The *Works and Days* begins with an invocation to the Muses, and many passages in the early part of the work, such as the account of the five races of men and the prophecy of the end of the Iron Age (109-201), seem to belong to the class of remote knowledge accessible to the bard through divine inspiration.\(^{142}\) As the poem continues, however, the content begins to reflect the practical wisdom of an experienced farmer rather than the vast knowledge at the Muses’ disposal; much of his advice, such as his recommendation for warm clothing in winter (536-546) and his opinion on the proper time to plough(448-482), seems obtainable from any industrious farmer with experience of the outdoors and the cycle of the seasons.\(^{143}\) The distinction between divine inspiration and experiential wisdom can be seen in Hesiod’s remarks on sailing. He concedes that he has little skill or training concerning ships \(\text{oùte ti nautìlìs σεσοφισμένοs oùte ti nìon, 649}\), and he observes that his only experience on the sea was a trip to Euboea from Aulis (651). He nonetheless feels confident discussing the subject because he has access to the knowledge of the gods. He notes:

\[
\text{τόσσον τοι νηών χε πεπείρημαι πολυγόμφων
άλλα καὶ ὑς ἐρείω Ζηνός νόον αἰγιόχοιο·
Μοῦσαι γάρ µ' ἐδίδαξαν ἀθέσφατον ὕμνον ἀείδειν. (WD 660-662)}
\]

Here Hesiod’s experience (πεπείρημαι) with ships is limited, but he compensates for this lack of experiential knowledge by referring to his capacity as a representative of Zeus and the Muses; both inspiration and personal experience are valid sources of knowledge, and when one falters the other can be substituted without damaging the credibility of the poet.

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142 These subjects seem to fall into the category of τά τ’ ἵοντα τά τ’ ἵσσόμενα πρὸ τ’ ἱόντα (Th. 38).

143 Hesiod does, however, consistently insert references to the will of the gods in his practical advice; often, though, these comments about the divine amount to little more than admission that the gods are unpredictable (ἄλλοτε ὅ’ ἄλλοις Ζηνός νόος αἰγιόχοιο / ἀργαλέος ὅ’ ἄνδρεσσι κατανέχειν νόσσαι, 483-484).
Xenophanes

The worlds of Homer and Hesiod are, as we have seen, filled with the pervasive presence of the gods; in both authors there is no doubt that the gods exist, are directly responsible for many of the occurrences on earth, interact and communicate with select human beings, and punish or reward humans for their behavior. Poets are depicted as having a position similar to that of seers that enables them to receive and interpret divine messages through inspiration from the Muses and to express that information through well-ordered poetic speech. Their authority on divine matters depends on this special relationship with the Muses, and the audience within these poems does not seem to question it.

Xenophanes remarks that the Greek audience, much like the listeners within the epic poems, accepts these poets as religious authorities: ἔς ἄρχης καὶ Ὡμήρου ἐπεῖ μεμαθήκασι πάντες ... (B10). Xenophanes, however, is highly critical of Homer and Hesiod’s interpretation of the gods, and he attacks their anthropomorphic and immoral depictions of the divine (B11-B12). Yet unlike Homer and Hesiod, Xenophanes does not assume a privileged relationship with the gods nor does he claim to have access to divine knowledge; in his conception of the world, the gods do not interact or communicate with anyone (αἰεὶ δὲ ἐν ταύτῃ μὴνει κνοώμενος οἴδαν, B26; οὔτοι ἀπ’ ἄρχης πάντα θεοὶ ἐννητοὶ’ ὑπέδειξαν, B18), and the poet no longer has the same privileged position that he has in epic. Xenophanes then must offer some other token of credibility in order to gain his audience’s acceptance and approval for his novel and provocative ideas. I will argue that Xenophanes redefines and reimagines poetic authority by incorporating certain elements

144 In the Iliad the gods seem to decide punishments and rewards based on pre-existing preferences for heroes and on acts of loyalty or disloyalty (e.g. Thamyris in II.2.591-600), whereas in the Odyssey we begin to see the beginnings of theodicy (1.32-43). In Hesiod’s work, Zeus is the foremost judge of justice.
from Homer and Hesiod (experiential knowledge and the wisdom of the wanderer) as well as inquiry and autopsy based methods that had become popular in Ionia during his lifetime. I will begin by comparing Xenophanes’ world to the world of epic, then I will discuss Xenophanes’ conception of truth and authority.

**The World of Xenophanes**

Xenophanes presents a world stripped of the divine interaction that was so pervasive in the poems of Homer and Hesiod. His one god is involved with events on earth, but this involvement is far more removed than the consistent presence of gods among men in the epic poems. He assigns two distinct types of influence on the world to the god(s): the creation of the universe and the source for the movement of all things. While Xenophanes never explicitly cites god as the creator of the universe, a number of his fragments suggest this conclusion. In B38 he notes that god produced (ἔφυσε) honey, which in turn influenced the human conception of sweetness. He raises a similar point in B36: ὡπόσα δὴ θνητοῖσι πεφήνασιν εἰσοράασθαι. The lack of context for the fragment obscures its precise meaning, but the use of the term “mortals” (θνητοῖσι) suggests that the gods are likely involved. The force of πεφήνασι is key to understanding the potential role of the divine in this fragment: the form πέφηνα traditionally represents an intransitive perfect.
in which case the involvement of the gods in this fragment is not altogether clear;\(^{148}\) Lesher conjectures that πεφήνασιν may be transitive, and the gods then would be the natural subject of the verb of revealing.\(^{149}\) If this is the case B36, like B38, assigns to the gods responsibility for creating, or in this case showing,\(^{150}\) what humans can perceive and draw inferences from in their world. Divine influence is also a source of movement in the universe. Xenophanes notes the greatest god “shakes everything” (πάντα κραδαίνει, B25). The image of shaking is, as scholars have noted,\(^{151}\) reminiscent of Homer’s depiction of Zeus; Zeus causes Olympus to shake with his nod (μέγαν δ’ ἔλελίξεν Ὁλυμπὸν, II. 530). Xenophanes subverts this image by removing the physical gesture from the act: the greatest god shakes through an effortless and complex mental process (νόου φρένι, B25; ὁὖλος ὅραι, ὁὖλος δὲ νοεῖ, ὁὖλος δὲ τ’ ἀκούει, B24) without need for movement (αἰεὶ δ’ ἐν ταῦτω μὴνε κινούμενος οὐδέν, B26).

The subversion of Homer’s image reveals the fundamental differences between Xenophanes’ conception of the role of the divine in the world and that of the epic poets. Homer and Hesiod consistently depict the gods as present and directly involved in affairs in the mortal world. Even when the gods accomplish things remotely, as when Zeus nods or when Apollo acts as the farshooter (ἐκηβόλος), the action is related through vivid and anthropomorphistic language: Zeus’s nod causes his hair to fall on his brows (II. 1.529-

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148 Guthrie (1971, 397) suggests that there may be a contrast between the things that are evident (πεφήνασιν) to mortals and divine matters beyond human experience.

149 Lesher 1992, 176-177.

150 Although the verb φαίνω is used in Homer to describe divine communication through omens (ἔφηνε, II. 2.324), Xenophanes has rejected the possibility of communication between gods and mortals in B18. If Lesher’s interpretation of πεφήνασιν is correct, then the perfect tense would suggest their revelation is complete (i.e. by creating the world and its visible properties) rather than a continual process.

151 Guthrie 1971, 374; Lesher 1992, 110.
Apollo is in motion (κινηθέντος) and walks down from Olympus before he strikes the Achaeans from a distance (II. 1.43-48). The epic gods, despite their immense power, are nonetheless limited by the anthropomorphic descriptions of their form and behavior. Xenophanes more clearly distinguishes gods from human by suggesting that the god accomplishes his will exclusively from afar, and that all divine actions are effortless and without any physical movement.

Xenophanes’ conception of a world free of immediate divine presence is consistent with the trend of demythologizing the universe found in contemporary writers. Philosophers like Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, as Voegelin notes, “replaced the divine figures of myth, in their search of origins, with symbols drawn from objects and substances of the world of sense perception.” Whereas Homer and Hesiod considered the Olympian gods to be the source of natural phenomena, the Ionian thinkers often assigned a divine significance to the fundamental principles and elements of the universe: Anaximander evidently called his ἄπειρον, the originative and fundamental essence of his cosmology (ἀρχή), immortal and indestructible (ἄθανατον γὰρ καὶ ἀνώλεθρον, B3); Anaximenes is said to have believed that air, his ἀρχή, was a god. While Xenophanes also drew inferences from the sensible world as a means of formulating the inadequacies of the epic gods, he did not like many Ionian thinkers associate the divine with the fundamental natural elements of the universe. Xenophanes did not attribute divine qualities to earth or water, his apparent ἀγκάι (B29, B33). Instead,

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152 Voegelin (1957) 167.

153 Cf. Jaeger 1936, 18-37 for a thorough discussion of the Ionian tendency to associate the divine with fundamental elements and rational principles.

he appears to have distinguished the physical universe from the world of the divine. In fragments B25 and B34 he refers to the universe (πᾶντα) and the god(s) as separate entities, which suggests that earth and water, as Lesher notes, “account for all things existing within the natural world, but the nature of the divine is another question.” In many respects, Xenophanes’ decision to assign such an influential role to a god that is distinct from the perceptible universe breaks away from the scientific trend of his Ionian predecessors and hearkens back to the pervasive presence of the gods in epic.

Xenophanes manages to incorporate both the inquiry-based methods of Ionian philosophy and the deeply religious attitudes found in epic poetry; although he is heavily critical of Homer and Hesiod, he includes a number of traditional elements into his poetry. I will argue that Xenophanes’ conception of truth and poetic authority is a synthesis of contemporary philosophical approaches and traditional ideas found in the works of Homer and Hesiod.

**Truth and Opinion in Xenophanes**

The notion of truth in Xenophanes’ poetry is closely associated with sense perception; what is true can be seen and experienced by his audience, while falsities are incongruous with the perceptible world. The fragments concerning natural philosophy (B27-B33, B37) stress the conformity of the world with our perceptions of it: the sun travels over the earth and spreads warmth (B31); top of the earth can be seen (ὁρᾶται) under our feet, but the bottom, which we cannot see, extends downward indefinitely

155 This interpretation is complicated by the accounts of Aristotle and later writers which claim that Xenophanes’ one god was the universe itself. Nevertheless, it is clear that Xenophanes does not assign divine significance to earth and water and that these elements properly belong to the category of πᾶντα moved by his god.

156 Lesher 1992, 134.

157 Snell 1960, 141.
(B28); a rainbow is not the goddess Iris but a colorful cloud upon sight (ἰδέσθαι, B32). By rooting his natural theories in perception, Xenophanes often rejects more popular and traditional theories. While his observation on the sun’s movement is not particularly provocative, his comments on the extent of earth and the nature of the rainbow challenge traditional conceptions. Homer and Hesiod limit the depth of the earth by locating Tartarus below it (II. 8.13-16, Th. 726-728). Xenophanes replaces the mythical understanding of the extent of the earth with his own model, which contrasts the defined upper boundary (which we can see) with indefinite depths beyond human perception (B28). Although Kirk, Raven, and Schofield brand Xenophanes’ formulation as “popular rather than intellectual,” there is perhaps an intellectual basis behind his conjecture. Aristotle alleges that Xenophanes’ postulation is based on a refusal to inquire into the cause (ἵνα μὴ πράγματ᾽ ἔχωσι ζητοῦντες τὴν αἰτίαν, On the Heavens 294a). Xenophanes, however, champions inquiry in other fragments, especially B18 (ἀλλὰ χρόνῳ ζητοῦντες ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἀμέινον); the indefinite nature of his earth may therefore have more to do with the impossibility of inquiry, since no one can see the limits of earth, rather than an unwillingness to investigate. His conception of the earth is based on what we can and cannot see rather than on mythological or popular ideas. His account of the rainbow in B32 is even more polemical, since he explicitly contrasts traditional misconception (ἡν τ’ Ἶριν καλέουσι) with reality (νέφος καὶ τοῦτο πέφυκε). Iris is the traditional messenger of the gods (e.g. II. 2.786-787, Th. 780-788), but Xenophanes maintains that a closer look

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158 Xenophanes does not here emphatically depersonalize the phenomenon, as he does the rainbow in B32. Lesher (1992, 139) notes, however, that Xenophanes may be implicitly contrasting this image of the sun with the Homeric god who personally bestows light and heat on earth and who, if angry, can choose to deny these gifts (Od. 12.377-383).

159 KRS 1995, 9-10.
reveals that the rainbow is actually a cloud. He rejects the belief in this as a divine avenue of communication because he can see (ἰδέσθαι) its true nature. The criterion for truth in these examples is utterly removed from aesthetic or proprietary concerns; Xenophanes determines the nature of reality through observation and perception.

These corrections of traditional thought do not, however, incorporate specific references to truth. In fact, Xenophanes does not at any point use the term ἀλήθεια to refer to his own poetry, nor does he ever make a claim as explicit as Hesiod’s ἐτήτυμα μυθησάμεν (WD 10). He does, however, think the limitations of human understanding have consequences for the truth-value of his poetry:

καὶ τὸ μὲν οὖν σαφὲς οὕτως ἀνήρ ἴδεν οὐδὲ τις ἔσται εἰδὼς ἀμφοὶ ἢςῶν τε καὶ ἄσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων, εἰ γὰρ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα τύχοι τετελεσμένοι εἰσίν, αὐτὸς ὅμως ἵδεν ὑπὸ δόκος δ’ ἐπὶ πᾶσι τέτυκται. (B34)

... ταῦτα δεδοξάσθω μὲν ἔοικότα τοῖς ἐτύμοις. (B35)\(^{160}\)

The “clear truth” (τὸ σαφὲς)\(^{161}\) about the gods and about the universe (περὶ πάντων) is beyond human understanding; no man has seen it (ἰδέν), nor will he ever know it (εἰδὼς). Xenophanes’ conception of truth here is connected with sense perception (ἰδέν) and constitutes a clear understanding. The parallel use of the etymologically related ἴδεν and εἰδὼς emphasizes the connection between experience and knowledge: mortals only know the certain truth of things that are within the realm of human experience and that they have perceived. As Fränkel concludes, “Xenophanes spoke here, in an ancient and very Greek way, of ‘seeing’ in order to designate a truly reliable knowledge.”\(^{162}\) Xenophanes’

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\(^{160}\) I am reading B35 as a continuation of the logic in B34. Cf. Lesher 1992, 171-176.

\(^{161}\) LSJ s.v. σαφῆς.

\(^{162}\) Fränkel 1974, 123.
truth depends on a degree of certainty obtained through immediate perception and experience; topics such as the gods and the universe, however, are beyond the experience of his audience (οὐτὶς ἀνὴρ ἰδεῖν) and they cannot understand the truth about them. Consequently, in these matters men must rely on opinion (δόκος), which approximates truth (ἐνικότα τοῖς ἐτύμοισι) when the topic is beyond human perception. There are then two degrees of truth to Xenophanes’ poetry: the clear truth (τὸ σαφές), which can be expressed when the subject matter is within the realm of human experience, and reasoned opinions (δόκος) that resemble truth but are uncertain because they are not empirically verifiable. I will first examine the significance of the term τὸ σαφές before discussing the nature of δόκος.

The expression τὸ σαφές is not found in epic poetry, but Homer uses the adverb σάφα to express the certainty of knowledge or the clarity of speech. Xenophanes’ use of the term is remarkable because by treating it as substantive adjective with the definite article and making it the direct object of a verb of sight he extends the applications of certainty: it is not only an indicator of the degree of one’s knowledge, it is also an independent and observable quality belonging to external objects. The implication of τὸ σαφές is that Xenophanes’ conception of truth is an exact understanding of the subject matter; this includes not only the ability to say something that has actually happened (τὰ μάλιστα τίχοι τετελεσμένον εἰπών) but also to have a clear understanding based on personal experience (οἶδε). The accuracy of the content is an independent quality of the work that is privileged above the aesthetic value of the poem and the audience’s concern.

163 Although the phrase σαφές δ᾽ οὐκ οἶδα appears in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes 208, the internal accusative σαφές does not appear to differ greatly in meaning from σάφα.

164 Cf. Cunliffe 1963 s.v. σάφα.
for social propriety. Thucydides uses the term in a very similar way: he warns his
audience that his account may not be as pleasing as the fanciful tales told by others (ἐς μὲν
ἀκρόασιν ἰσως τὸ μὴ μυθῶδες αὐτῶν ἀτερπέστερον φανεῖται), but it will benefit all those who
wish to examine the clear truth (τὸ σαφὲς) of the things that have happened and will
happen (1.22.4). Truth as historical accuracy is contrasted with the pleasing qualities of
exaggerated and unrealistic stories; it must be examined (σκοπεῖν) in order to be
understood, just as Xenophanes’ truth depends on knowledge based on immediate
perception (ἰδεῖν, εἰδώς, B34).165

Xenophanes, like Thucydides, rejects the mythical explanations of his
predecessors (B11-B12) and defines the truth of his account through empirical language.
Xenophanes’ insistence on inquiry and experience as a gauge of truth is not unique. As
Thomas notes, other roughly contemporary forms of literature were asserting their
authority through the “language of proof and evidence.”166 Medical writers inferred
truths from τεκμήρια, such as in *Airs, Waters, Places* 8, where the writer claims one can
glean the greatest evidence (τεκμήριον μέγιστον) about the formation of rain water from a
man wearing a cloak who sits in the sun.167 The orator Antiphon often draws inferences
from τεκμήρια, as when he calls the defendants’ unwillingness to supply their slaves for
torture the greatest evidence (μέγιστα τεκμήρια) of their guilt in *Against the Stepmother*
11. Historians such as Hecataeus and Herodotus published historical works based on
inquiry (ιστορίη) and including inferences drawn from autoptic experience; Heraclitus

165 Thucydides’ examination of history incorporates his own personal observations (οἷς τε αὐτὸς παρῆν) as well as the observations of others, although he concedes that eyewitness testimony is often unreliable (1.22.2-3).

166 Thomas 2000, 128-130.

167 Thomas 2000, 140.
joined Xenophanes with Hecataeus in his criticism of polymathy, which suggests that both thinkers were recognized as proponents of “Milesian ἱστορίη in literary form.”

The process of observation and inference from physical evidence was also an important trend in the development of philosophy. Although the early Milesian philosophers proposed novel cosmological theories to replace mythological conceptions of the world, there are unfortunately few explicit references to inquiry or evidence in the extant fragments and several of their theories seem dogmatic. Nevertheless, there are several pieces of testimonia that suggest that even these earliest philosophers were engaged in empirical and inferential enterprises: Thales’ prediction of the eclipse was most likely based on a “long series of empirical observations,” even if he himself was unaware of the cause; Anaximander’s accounts of the origins of living creatures and mankind may have developed from his observations of mud-flies and other creatures living near or in the sea. Xenophanes, like his philosophical predecessors, does not frequently use the language of proof, but it is clear from the emphasis on experience and perception in his theories on nature (B28, B31, B32) and human knowledge (B34), as well as from his endorsement of seeking (ζητοῦντες) in B18, that observation and inference are essential components of the truth found in his poetry. Unlike these thinkers, however, Xenophanes incorporates these values into a poetic model by expressing his

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168 Kahn 1979, 108.
169 Thomas 2000, 139.
170 KRS 1995, 175 mentions that Xenophanes’ comment on the limits of the earth (B28) may have been an attack against the unsupported propositions by Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes.
171 KRS 1995, 82. They add, however, that these observations were probably derived from other sources, namely from Babylonian records, rather than from Thales’ own experience.
172 KRS 1995, 142.
thoughts in verse and explicitly contrasting his conception of truth with that of the epic poets.

Although Xenophanes use of τὸ σαφὲς as an indicator of poetic truth is novel, the contrast between clear knowledge and supposition is a familiar one in epic poetry. One reason that epic characters have uncertain knowledge is that particular matters are beyond their personal experience: Odysseus rebukes Thersites for commenting on the future, which is beyond human understanding (οὐδὲ τί πω σάφα ἦμεν ὡς ἢσται τάδε ἔγγα, Il. 2.252); the old shepherd in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes 202-211 does not know for sure (σαφὲς δ᾽ οὐκ οἶδα) whether the child Hermes stole Apollo’s cattle because he does not trust his perception (ἄγγαλέον μὲν ὡς’ ὡς καλμοίσιν οἴδοι) and must make a conjecture (ἔδοξα...νοῆσαι). Occasionally the incomplete knowledge of one character is contrasted with the accurate understanding of another: in Odyssey 17.153-154 Theoclymenus criticizes Telemachus’ uncertain knowledge (οὐ σάφα οἶδεν) with his own ability to prophesy exactly (ἀτρεκέως γάρ τοι μαντεύσομαι). In this example, Theoclymenus possesses a particular skill and expertise concerning the divine – the ability to read omens – that Telemachus does not. Seers can access divine knowledge and thus know clearly matters which other mortals cannot, much as a poet can transmit the absolute experiential knowledge of the Muses (πάρεστε τε ἰστε τε πάντα), while others must rely on report (κλέος, Il. 2.484-493). Xenophanes uses the Homeric distinction between certain and uncertain knowledge, but adapts it by removing the possibility of divine communication with humans. Clear and certain understanding is associated with sense perception in both authors, as is the recognition of limitations of human experience and knowledge. While Homer and Hesiod can transcend these mortal boundaries by summoning the Muses
through divine inspiration, Xenophanes argues that the gods have never communicated everything to mortals (οὐτοὶ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς πάντα θεοὶ ζηντοίοι’ ὑπέδειξαν, B18) and that since the clear and certain truth is only attainable through experience and inquiry, men will never understand τὸ σαφὲς about the nature of gods and the universe.

Although men cannot gain certain knowledge about subjects beyond their experience, Xenophanes proposes an alternative standard for gauging his work. He exhorts his audience to suppose that his theories on the gods and the universe are approximations of the truth (ταῦτα δεδοξάσθω μὲν ἐοικότα τοῖς ἐτύμοισι). Like all mortals, he must rely on opinion in matters that he cannot personally observe (δόκος δ’ ἐπὶ πᾶσι τέτυκται). Not all opinions, however, are considered equal. Men suppose (δοκέουσι) that gods are born and possess human physical traits (B14), opinions that Xenophanes finds clearly erroneous. Why then are Xenophanes’ opinions to be trusted more than those of others? Although he never says so explicitly, he seems to privilege his own ideas about the gods because he removes the observable contradictions and inconsistencies found in popular religion and epic poetry. The desire to represent the gods as analogous in form and behavior to the believer leads to incongruous depictions of universal gods (B15-B16) and stories of honored deities engaged in dishonorable behavior (B11-B12). Xenophanes’ conjectures, while not certain truth, are closer to it because they are free of the problems found in the opinions of others.

Xenophanes uses epic models also in this formulation of the values of opinions. His claim that his theories are to be considered as resembling truth (ἐοικότα τοῖς ἐτύμοισι) clearly resembles passages found in Homer and Hesiod. Homer describes Odysseus’ deceptive storytelling as ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγων ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοία (Od. 19.203), while Hesiod’s
Muses inform him ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοία (Th. 27). In both cases, the plausibility of lies and deception (ψεύδεα) is expressed through their resemblance to the truth (ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοία). In neither passage is the likeness to truth particularly beneficial to the listener: Penelope longs to hear the truth about her husband, but Odysseus, in order to fulfill his purpose, uses lies that cause Penelope to cry in mourning (Od. 19.204-209); Hesiod claims to tell the truth (ἐτήτυμα μυθησαίμην, WD 10), but, inasmuch as his truth differs from the truths of other poets, he assigns responsibility to deceptive Muses. Xenophanes subverts this model by contrasting the truth with opinions rather than with lies. The clear truth (τὸ σαφές) is, of course, preferable to opinion, just as truth is preferable to lies for the listeners in epic. The decision to promote theories resembling truth, however, is not based on a desire to conceal the truth but rather an inability to understand it fully. The essentially negative qualities of lies (ψεύδεα) in epic poetry become potentially beneficial in the process of explaining topics beyond human experience.

Xenophanes’ conception of truth incorporates the contemporary intellectual trend of inquiry and inference, but he expresses his findings through the language and models of his epic predecessors. Xenophanes opted to write in meter, though previous Presocratic thinkers like Anaximander and Anaximenes wrote in prose. Although prose writing was fairly undeveloped and poetry was still the predominant form of expression, Xenophanes does not show any signs that he wishes to escape the poetic medium. He incorporates elegaic, iambic, and epic meters; 49 of his 119 extant lines are in dactylic hexameter and it is in these that he presents his criticisms of Hesiod and Homer (B10-B12), his propositions on the nature of the one god (B23-B26), and his comments on the limitations
of human knowledge (B18, B34-B35). In addition to using the epic meter, Xenophanes also uses terms and phrases common in epic poetry. Torres-Guerra notes eighteen formulaic expressions from epic found in the Xenophanean corpus, as well as eight unique phrases in Homer that are incorporated by Xenophanes.\textsuperscript{173} Furthermore, Xenophanes’ reference to the genre of Greek poetry (ἀοιδάων ὃς γένος Ἑλλαδικῶν, B6) suggests that he “visualizes Greek poetry as a kind of single family of songs, even as Homer and Hesiod viewed the minstrels themselves as members of the same tribe or family.”\textsuperscript{174} Though Xenophanes rejects the epic configurations of the divine, he nonetheless presents himself and his theories as part of the poetic tradition. Consequently, his authority is based not only on his ability to provide truths derived from sense experience and inference, but, as I shall argue, also on established poetic models such as the appeal to ethical values and the traditional poetic persona.

\textbf{Traditional and Intellectual Authority}

The concept of the divine as the source of justice develops throughout epic poetry. Zeus disavows divine responsibility for mortal crimes in the beginning of the \textit{Odyssey} (1.32-43), and Hesiod consistently associates Zeus with the standards of justice.\textsuperscript{175} Xenophanes, much like Hesiod, aligns his conception of the divine with justice and other moral values. In B1 he depicts a symposium in which he couches innovative ideas in a traditional setting:

\begin{verbatim}
νῦν γὰρ δὴ ζάπεδον καθαρὸν καὶ χεῖρες ἀπάντων
καὶ χύλικες· πλεκτοὶ δὲ ἀμφιτιθεῖ στεφάνους,
ἄλλος δὲ εὖδες μύρον ἐν φιάλῃ παρατείνει·
χρατήρ δὲ ἐστηκεν μεστὸς ἐυφροσύνης,
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{173} Torres-Guerra 1999 \textit{passim}.

\textsuperscript{174} Havelock 1966, 52.

\textsuperscript{175} Cf. Voegelin 1957, 131-133.
There are many conventional elements in this description: the external setting is both clean and pure (καθαρόν) and the proper procedure is followed: libation (σπείσαντας, 15), prayer (εὐξαμένους,15), paean (ὕμνου) and finally drinking (πίνειν, 17) and entertainment, in this case proper storytelling (ἐσθλὰ πιὼν ἀναφαίνει, 19). The poet creates an analogy between the propriety of these settings and procedures and the propriety of what is said: just as the floor and water must be pure (καθαρόν), so must be the words uttered (καθαροῖσι λόγοις, 14). The suggested content of the prayers and songs contains both traditional and innovative elements. Xenophanes’ recommended prayer is for the ability to accomplish what is just (εὐξαμένους τὰ δίκαια δύνασθαι / πρήσσειν, 15-16). In this prayer he, like Hesiod, is attributing to the gods the role of dispensers of justice. Unlike Hesiod, however, Xenophanes is not suggesting that the gods personally avenge and reward just behavior; rather he insinuates that the gods promote justice by granting humans the power (δύνασθαι) to carry out justice for themselves. The nature of this divine

176 Marcovich 1978, 7-11.
assistance is not immediately apparent; one could argue, for example, that the gods promote our ability to act justly by granting us prosperity, inasmuch as it is much easier to be just individuals when our basic needs are met.\(^{177}\) Marcovich argues that ability indicates “intellectual capacity to choose the right thing to do,”\(^{178}\) which is an interpretation that is consistent with the intellectual nature of Xenophanes’ one god in B23-B26 and the emphasis on mental activities within this poem (μνημοσύνη, 20; προμηθείης, 24), though the term δύνασθα does not by itself suggest mental or intellectual capacities. At any rate, it is evident that Xenophanes is drawing on the traditional ethical association of justice with the gods but has reformulated it to fit with his more refined and intellectual conception of the divine.

The content of drinking songs (19-23) further illustrates the balance between tradition and innovation in this poem. Xenophanes recommends that men sing of noble acts (ἐσθλά) while incorporating memory (μνημοσύνη) and virtue (ἀρετῆς) into their songs. This appeal to traditional values might also call to mind the glorious deeds of battle found in epic poetry, but Xenophanes makes it clear that he is rejecting accounts of the mythical battles and conflicts (μάχας, στάσις) of Centaurs, Titans, and Giants. These stories are denounced as useless (οὐδὲν χρηστόν) and as fictions of his predecessors (πλάσματα τῶν προτέρων). Although Xenophanes rejects the teachings of former poets, he nonetheless maintains an essentially ethical portrayal of the gods; by couching his innovative ideas within the traditional sympotic setting and conventional values, he affirms the ethical and proprietary principles that are an essential part of poetic authority.

\(^{177}\) E.g. Cephalus’ remarks on wealth and justice in Republic 330d-331b.

\(^{178}\) Marcovich 1978, 8.
The ethical component of Xenophanes’ view of the divine is also found in his attacks against Homer and Hesiod, as well as in his positive comments on the nature of god. The gods in epic poetry are guilty of moral offenses (ἀθεμίστια ἔργα, B12): they steal, commit adultery, and deceive each other (B11). This criticism operates on two levels: on the one hand, the gods’ anthropomorphic behavior suggests that the poets are basing their representations of the gods on observations of human activities rather than on divine sources; on the other hand, the specifically unethical nature of the gods’ actions immediately suggests to Xenophanes’ audience the inconsistency of the development towards a divine affiliation with justice found in epic poetry. Although Hesiod repeatedly assigns Zeus the position of arbiter of justice, he also attributes immoral behavior to him, such his deception and consumption of Metis (Th. 886-900). Xenophanes’ rejection of the epic conception of the divine incorporates then both an ethical and a logical appeal, which demonstrates his desire to include both contemporary models of philosophical thought and a refined version of the traditional ethical values found in the poetic tradition. Similarly, in his comments on the stationary nature of his one god, he argues that it is not seemly (ἐπιπρέπει) for the god to travel. The term ἐπιπρέπει has both empirical and moral connotations: the term is related to appearance and it can indicate empirically what an object appears to do, descriptively what actions are characteristic of it, and prescriptively what actions are appropriate and fitting for it. Xenophanes’ description of his god here can be read in two ways: empirically, one can see no trace of divine movement in the universe; ethically, the concept of divine locomotion does not fit

179 In Homer the term ἐπιπρέπω is exclusively used to describe physical appearance (Od. 24.252), though πρέπω and its other compounds often denote other types of distinction such as ones reputation, as Cunliffe (1963 s.v. πρέπω and μεταπρέπω) notes.

180 Lesher 1992, 111-112.
the exalted status of the gods found in other fragments such as B1. The concern for the proper dignity and moral excellence of the gods is a significant element in Xenophanes’ representation of the divine. This ethical concern adds traditional poetic authority to his more scientific concern with inquiry and inference.

Another traditional element of Xenophanes’ authority is his development of a poetic persona. While Homer remains anonymous in his poems, Hesiod presents himself as a distinct character with an authority derived from both his special relationship with the Muses and his extensive personal experience with agricultural and other everyday skills. Xenophanes does not, as Hesiod does, name himself in his poetry or describe his familial relationships. He does, however, offer several key details about himself: he is extremely old (at least 76 years of age, according to B8), he has traveled a great deal (ἐγὼ δὲ ἐμαυτὸν πόλιν ἐκ πόλεως φέρων ἐβλήστριζον, B45), and his wandering is related to his resentment of the pervasive Eastern influence on his home in Ionia (B3, B22). This persona is consistent with the representation of poets found in Homer and Hesiod. Like Eumaeus’ assessment of bards in Odyssey 17.385, he is an outsider and perpetual ξεῖνος: he wanders throughout Greece (B8, B45) and has a keen interest in preserving the proper etiquette in the guest-host relationship (B22). Unlike the poets in Homer, though, Xenophanes is well versed in the world around him; he is essentially the antithesis of Demodocus, in that his conception of poetic truth is fundamentally dependent on vision rather than on divine communication. The notion that traveling can be a source of knowledge is also found in Homer. Odysseus in his travels sees many towns and comes

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181 Lesher 1992, 112; Burkert 1985, 308.
182 Xenophanes seems to follow Homer’s precedent in recommending that the host feed the guest before asking him questions (Od. 3.69-70).
to understand the minds of many men (πολλῶν δ’ ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω, Od. 1.3), and later, while in disguise, he claims to Eumaeus that his travels (ἐπὶ πολλὰ δ’ ἀλήθην) grant him the ability to give tidings about Odysseus (Od. 14.120).\(^{183}\)

Xenophanes’ persona incorporates both the traditional image of the wandering poet and the particular type of empirical knowledge that was alien to the Homeric bard but accessible to other characters. Xenophanes’ old age and many travels prove to be valuable sources of experiential knowledge. By contrasting Thracian and Ethiopian depictions of the gods (B15) he provides a vivid comment on general human practice; his juxtaposition of cultures at the northern and southern extremities calls to mind his extensive travelling and implies the universal nature of his inference.

One final element of Xenophanes’ authority is his insistence on the beneficial nature and utility of his poetry. In B2 he chastises the city for placing so much honor on athletes when his wisdom (ἡμετέρη σοφίη) is better (ἀμείνων) than their strength (11-12). The term σοφίη is found twice in this poem and nowhere else in the extant fragments. Its nature here is not immediately apparent: is he referring to a particular type of wisdom or art that he possesses or does he mean the broad range of wisdom found generally in his poetry? Furthermore, does σοφίη refer to poetic art,\(^{184}\) wisdom,\(^{185}\) or some combination of the two? Although these questions are difficult to answer conclusively, it seems best to regard σοφίη as a more general quality that covers Xenophanes’ intellectual conception of poetry, inasmuch as in other fragments he refers to his work generally as his own thought (ἐνιαυτοὶ / βληστρίζοντες ἐμὴν φρονίδα ἀν’ Ἑλλάδα γῆν, B8). At any rate Xenophanes argues

\(^{183}\) Von Reden 1995, 38.

\(^{184}\) Guthrie 1962, 364.

\(^{185}\) Marcovich 1978, 22.
that his σοφίη possesses a practical value: it keeps the city in good order (ἐν εὐνομίῃ, 19) and it makes the city richer (πιαίνει...μυχοὺς πόλεως, 22). The utility of his poetry is moreover associated with ethical values; not only is it impractical to honor athletes’ strength over his wisdom, it is also unjust (οὐδὲ δίκαιον, 13). The things which promote good order (εὐνομίη) are thus both practically beneficial and morally right, whereas acts of disorder, which include violent and lawless behavior, are in other fragments condemned as useless (τοῖσ’ οὐ̄δὲν χρηστὸν ἔνεστι, B1.23) as well as immoral (B11).

Xenophanes here is again adapting traditional poetic values and inserting his own innovative thoughts and interests. He wishes to retain and restore the universal honor paid to poets found in the works of Homer, but he bases this honor not on an ability to deliver pleasing accounts of mythical events but on his intellectual virtues that promote practical and ethical benefits. The poet contributes to order, but Xenophanes’ order (εὐνομίη) is founded on contemporary government (πόλις) rather than the κόσμος and ἀρετή of Homer’s aristocratic values.

Xenophanes’ interest in the medium of poetry is not superficial. He manages to adapt traditional poetic language and values to fit his provocative conceptions of the gods, truth, and authority. But to what extent are his notions of truth and authority unique? We have seen the influence of traditional epic models and contemporary intellectual trends on Xenophanes’ work, but how influential were these on other contemporary poets and to what degree does Xenophanes’ work fall into the general poetic patterns emerging in the 6th and 5th centuries? In my concluding chapter, I will

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186 As Marcovich (1978, 20-21) notes, Xenophanes is not accusing athletes of causing ὑβρίς or disorder, as others have claimed, but rather suggests that they do not positively contribute to the ordering of the city.
discuss the poets Parmenides and Pindar and compare their conceptions of gods, truth, and authority with those of Xenophanes.
Xenophanes’ conceptions of truth and authority privilege empirical knowledge and human investigative enterprise over claims to divine inspiration and communication, but he also manages to frame these modern ideas within traditional poetic values and assumptions. In the previous chapter I mentioned the intellectual trends found in medical, historical, rhetorical, and philosophical writers contemporary with Xenophanes. I now wish to examine his poetic peers: to what degree is his representation of truth and authority unique? How radical is his attempt to redefine his audience’s understanding of the world and the gods? Although Xenophanes’ poetry shares a number of important features with many poems in the lyric and elegiac genres, I will concentrate on two contemporary poets, Parmenides and Pindar, whose conceptions of the gods, truth, and authority will serve as fruitful comparisons for those of Xenophanes. Parmenides, the alleged pupil of Xenophanes, expresses his innovative theories on the nature of Being within a hexameter poem full of traditional poetic devices and motifs. Pindar composes epinician odes that relate recent athletic victories and political events to mythical stories and comments on the world of the gods. While these two poets offer very different perspectives on the gods, truth, and authority, they both rely on claims to a special relationship with the divine. Xenophanes, like them, incorporates traditional poetic values into his work, but his criteria for truth include firm adherence to autopsy as well as a

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187 These include the general focus on the individual (Snell 1960, 43-70), the rejection of certain mythical accounts found in epic poetry (e.g. Stesichorus’ revision of the Helen story, 192 Campbell), and the attention to decorum in sympotic settings (e.g. Anacreon 11a-b).
complete reliance on human investigation, neither of which is found in the same degree in the works of Parmenides or Pindar.

**Parmenides**

The extant fragments of Parmenides seem to belong to a single hexameter poem that details his visit to an unnamed goddess and her report to him. The goddess’ speech, which comprises all but the first fragment, is divided into two sections: the first part of her account (B2-B8.49) concerns the way of truth (ἀληθὴς ὁδός, B.8.17-18), that Being (τὸ ἔὸν) exists and is ungenerated, undying, unchangeable, and complete; the second part (B8.50-B19) details the opinions of mortals (βροτῶν δόξας, B1.30) and includes cosmological speculations and descriptions of natural phenomena. Parmenides’ distinction between ἀληθείη and δόξα is in some ways similar to Xenophanes’ formulation of τὸ σαφές and δόκος: both authors offer specific criteria for determining truth as well as conjectures that do not meet these criteria. Parmenides’ account, however, indicates that the truth about the universe is attainable for particular individuals, whereas Xenophanes must resort to supposition in his treatment of the gods and the universe, inasmuch as these matters cannot be personally observed and experienced. I will first discuss Parmenides’ conception of truth before I discuss his use of traditional and innovative elements in establishing his authority.

Parmenides uses the term ἀληθείη to designate the positive truth-value of the goddess’ account and, by extension, his own poetry. The words ἀληθείη and ἀληθὴς are found seven times in the first part of the goddess’ report; the only other term in his work that has a definite truth-value, ἑτήτυμος, is found just once (B8.18). The truth of his account of Being is in opposition both to the impossibility of Not-Being (B2) and to
mortal opinions (B1.30). While the dichotomy between Being and Not-Being represents the fundamental distinction (ἡ κρίσις) in Parmenides’ argument (B8.15-16), he introduces his conception of truth by opposing it to human conjecture. In his proem, Parmenides does not contrast ἀληθεία with ἴδεω, as Hesiod does (Th. 26-28), but with the opinions of mortals:

χασιν ἔσε σε πάντα πυθέσθαι
ἡμέν ἀληθείας εὐκυκλέους ἀτρεμές ἤτορ
ηδὲ βροτῶν δόξας, ταῖς οὐκ ἐν πίστις ἀληθῆς. (B1.28-30)

This introduction to the two ways of inquiry provides some insight into Parmenides’ conception of truth. The truth is well-rounded (εὐκυκλέος), has an unmoved heart (ἀτρεμές ἤτορ), and lends to an account credibility (πίστις) not found in mortal opinions. The terms εὐκυκλέος and ἀτρεμές have caused confusion among scholars. The words seem to be refering to motionless and sphere-like properties of Being described in B8, but the equation of Being with truth itself has not satisfied all.188 Some have adopted Sextus’ reading, εὐπειθέος (Adv. Math. 7.111), over Simplicius’ εὐκυκλέος (De Caelo 557);189 Fränkel suggests ἀτρεκές to replace ἀτρεμές.190 While the latter emendation has not found many supporters, the former seems to fit plausibly with the connection between truth and persuasion found in this fragment (πίστις ἀληθῆς) and in others: in B2 he notes that the path of persuasion (Πειθοῦς κέλευθος) is attended by truth, and he ends the first part of his work by referring to it as πιστὸν λόγον ὣδε νόημα / ἀμφὶς ἀληθείας (8.50-51). Furthermore the term εὐκυκλής appears only here, whereas the adjective εὐκυκλός is found in other texts.

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188 Jameson 1958, 22-23.
190 Fränkel 1975, 352 n. 11.
as well as in Parmenides’ poem (B8.43). The choice to retain Diels’ εὐκυκλέος as the lectio difficilior is certainly tenable, since Simplicius is recognized as our best authority on Parmenides and there is perhaps an equivalence between truth and reality found in the term ἀτρέμες. The connection between truth and persuasion is nevertheless a pervasive theme in the work that needs further exploration.

The way of truth possesses a persuasive element not found in opinions of mortals. The nature of this element is not immediately clear: what is the connection between truth and persuasion and from where does Parmenides’ account derive these qualities? Mourelatos argues that truth “will exercise a compelling power over men, both each and all.” The compelling power of persuasion results in men’s trust and obedience; even men who adhere to false beliefs trust that their opinions are true (πεποιθότες εἶναι ἀληθῆ, B8.39). Parmenides’ account of Being, which corrects men’s false assumptions, attempts to overturn these false assumptions through its emphasis on truth and logical necessity; his conception of Being is marked by necessity (χρή, B6) and compulsion (ἀνάγκη, B8.16, 30), and πίστις ἀληθῆ drives away (ἀπῶσε) the impossible notions of the generation and destruction of Being (B8.28). Parmenides’ truth is not, like Xenophanes’ τὸ σαφές, derived from autopsy; on the contrary, he remarks that sight and hearing are unreliable means of gauging the truth:

οὐ γὰρ μὴποτε τοῦτο δαμὴν εἶναι μὴ ἔσοντα·
ἀλλὰ σὺ τῆσδ’ ἄρ’ ὕδωρ διξῆς εἴης νόημα
μηδὲ σὲ ἔσος πολύπειρον ἐόντον κατὰ τῆρδε διάσωι,

νομάν ἄσποτον ὅμμα καὶ ἡχήεσσαν ἀκουήν
καὶ γλῶσσαν, ἡρωῦν δὲ λόγῳ πολύδηρην ἔλεγχον

191 Jameson 1958, 24-25.
192 Taran 1965, 16-17.
Parmenides describes the senses as ineffective (“unseeing sight,” ἄσκοπον ὀμμα) and imprecise (“ringing hearing,” ἠχήεσσαν ἀκουήν). The truth - that Being is one, eternal, and immutable – cannot be found through the senses and habitual experience (ἐθος πολύπειρον) because these lead men to believe that Being is generated, destroyed, and changeable (B8.38-41). This inability to distinguish Being and Not-Being is ironically linked with blindness and deafness (τυφλοί, κωφοί, B6.7). The senses are not useful as critical tools (ἄκριτα φῦλα, B6.7), and so the argument must be decided by reason (κρῖναι δὲ λόγῳ, B7).

The series of deductive arguments made in B8 and other fragments reveals that Being cannot be as mutable and varied as it appears to the senses; for example, he argues that if there can only be Being and Not-Being (B2, B8.15-18) and if Not-Being, because it is inconceivable, is impossible (B2, B6), then Being cannot be generated or change because Not-Being would be the only source for change and generation (B8.5-15, 26-28).

Parmenides argues that truth and persuasiveness are found only in reasoning and abstract argumentation, while the senses lead to false opinions that contradict the conclusions derived from these methods.

The second part of Parmenides’ poem is dedicated to descriptions of δόξαι, which include comments on the physical composition of the heavens and the universe. This portion of the poem has raised several significant critical questions, most notably how these descriptions of natural phenomena and their sources fit in with the first part of the poem.

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194 Taran (1965, 61-72) argues that this is a specific attack on Heraclitus and similar thinkers. Although this is possible, his argument that this cannot be referring to humans in general because Parmenides refers to two groups of mortals in B8.53-59 seems unconvincing.

195 It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe in full the nature of Parmenides’ Being and the argumentation found in fragments B2-B8. For a more detailed discussion of these topics, see KRS 1995, 249-254 and Mourelatos 1970, 94-135.
poem, which denies the possibility of change, movement, distinction, generation, and destruction. If there can be only Being and Not-Being, why do the goddess and Parmenides bother describing δόξαι that are explicitly prefaced as being false (B1.28-30, 8.51-52)? Before I address this question, I will focus my attention on the meaning of the term δόξα. In Xenophanes’ work, the word δόκος and related terms refer to suppositions and conjecture. Parmenides use of such words has two shades of meaning: the first, like Xenophanes’ usage, has a subjective force and refers to opinions and beliefs (βροτῶν δόξας, B1.30); the second has a more objective sense and describes how things seem or appear (τὰ δοκοῦντα, B1.31). Is the second part of Parmenides’ poem concerned with the world of opinions, the world of appearances, or both? Taran sees the two notions as compatible and translates τὰ δοκοῦντα as “the beliefs of men,” “what appears to men,” and “the appearances.” Mourelatos draws a stronger distinction between the two and argues that δόξα and related terms consistently bear the connotation of acceptance and belief rather than of appearance. There is, however, a connection in Parmenides’ argument between men’s beliefs and things as they appear. He notes that the senses are unreliable guides for mortals and that the truth can only be realized through argumentation (λόγος, B7). He does not seem to have attributed any reality to beliefs based on appearances and sense experience; the only real thing for Parmenides is Being itself (οὐδὲν γὰρ ἂν ἦστιν ἂν ἦσται / ἄλλο πάρεξ τοῦ ἔόντος, B8.36-37); everything else exists in name only. Whereas Xenophanes’ conception of δόκος serves as a viable, albeit

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197 Taran 1965, 210-216.

198 Mourelatos (1970, 197-221) highlights (and perhaps overestimates) the etymological connection between δόξα and δέχομαι; he does, however, concede that Parmenides also attacks men’s confidence in physical appearances, but argues that he uses other terms, such as μορφή, to refer to these appearances.
inferior, alternative when autopsy and personal experience are not available avenues for acquiring information, Parmenides’ δόξαι are fundamentally untrue because they violate the principles and tenets established by logical argumentation in B8. Xenophanes can say that his suppositions on the world of the divine resemble the truth (ἐοικότα τοῖς ἐτύμοισι, B35) since the primary distinction between δόκος and τὸ σαφές is that the latter has been verified by direct observation while the former has not and often cannot be. Parmenides does not and cannot assign any positive truth-value to δόξαι because he does not believe in degrees of truth; he poses a fundamental distinction between Being and Not-Being and excludes all other possibilities (B2, B8.15-16).

If these δόξαι are devoid of any positive truth-value, why does Parmenides bother reporting them at all? He makes two comments that perhaps explain why he appends the δόξαι to his account of Being. The first remark comes at the end of the proem, after the goddess says that he will learn both the truth and the opinions of mortals:

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ἀλλ’ ἐμπης καὶ ταῦτα μαθήσεαι, ὡς τὰ δοκοῦντα χρῆν δοκίμως εἶναι διὰ παντὸς πάντα περὶντα. (B1.31-32)
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The meaning of these lines is highly contested. Taran argues that the goddess is here is explaining how it was necessary (χρῆν) for what appeared (τὰ δοκοῦντα) to exist acceptably (δοκίμως εἶναι) for mortals before the existence of the logical distinctions found in Parmenides’ poem.\(^{199}\) Recognizing word play between δοκοῦντα and δοκίμως, Mourelatos sees these lines a comment on how what is accepted (τὰ δοκοῦντα) would have to be (counterfactual χρῆν) to exist acceptably (δοκίμως εἶναι);\(^{200}\) in other words, Parmenides is reporting false δόξαι for the sake of argument in order show how these

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\(^{199}\) Taran 1965, 210-216.

\(^{200}\) Mourelatos 1970, 210-216.
conjectures would have to exist in order for them to be considered genuine.\textsuperscript{201} There are many other critical interpretations,\textsuperscript{202} but Mourelatos’ reading seems to fit closely with Parmenides’ other explicit comment on the reasons for discussing the δόξαι:

\[
tόν σοι ἐγὼ διάκοσμον ἐοικότα πάντα φατιζω,\\
ὅσ σοι μὴ ποτέ τίς σε βροτῶν γνώμη παρελάσῃ. (B8.60-61)
\]

The goddess final preface before the account of mortal opinions concerns authority:

Parmenides will learn the “deceptive order” (κόσμον ἀπατηλὸν, B8.52) of her account so that no other mortal theory (τις βροτῶν γνώμη) can outstrip him. By learning mortal opinions, he can present an account of the natural world that, though false, is appealing and more logically sound than the theories of other thinkers. His authority is thus predicated both on his ability to present the truth - that Being exists - and on the strength of his false, but well-reasoned, account of mortal δόξαι that excels all other accounts of the perceptible world.

Like Xenophanes, Parmenides uses traditional poetic language to express his innovative arguments. There is an abundance of words and phrases either drawn directly from Homer and Hesiod or modeled on expressions found in their poems.\textsuperscript{203} To what degree does his authority rely on traditional poetic values? I will argue that although Parmenides uses epic language, images, and motifs, his ideas on the nature of Being are more difficult to fit into the poetic tradition than the theology of Xenophanes. The vivid imagery and language in the proem and the reliance on divine revelation seem more

\textsuperscript{201} Mourelatos 1970, 216-219.

\textsuperscript{202} Cf. Taran 1965, 202-216 for a survey of scholarly interpretations on this passage and on the relationship between ἀληθείη and δόξαι.

\textsuperscript{203} Mourelatos (1970, 4-11) notes that over 90\% of Parmenides’ vocabulary is found in early epic and cites many further examples of exact or close verbal parallels between Parmenides’ poem and the works of Homer (including the Homeric Hymns).
traditionally epic than anything found in Xenophanes’ hexameter; the arguments themselves, however, and the focus on λόγος as the criterion for judgment of truth are wholly non-traditional. The overall effect is perhaps, as Mourelatos says about Parmenides’ meter, “at once too modern and too archaic.”

The proem contains a vivid description of a metaphysical journey and divine revelation; the narrator is led by the Heliades past the gates of Night and Day to the goddess who explains to him both the true nature of Being and the false opinions of men. This revelatory event has, like Hesiod’s encounter with the Muses in *Theogony* 24-34, sparked much critical debate concerning its meaning and sincerity. Some have argued that the proem is presented as a genuine experience, while others have argued that the journey is purely allegorical or metaphorical. The presence of images and ideas that recur in the goddess’ speech - such as light and darkness (Ἡλιάδες, Νυκτός, φάος, Νυκτός τε καὶ Ἡματος, B1.9-11; πάντα φάος καὶ νύξ ὁνόμασται, B9), circles (κύκλος, B1.8; εὐκύκλου σφαίρης, B8.43), and persuasion (πεῖσαν, B1.16; Πειθοῦς ἐστι κέλευθος, B2) – perhaps suggests that this journey is an allegorical trip beyond the world of the senses and opinions (i.e. beyond the gates of night and day) and into the world of unified Being (i.e. into the world of the goddess). This does not prove that the experience is intended to be interpreted as entirely figurative; as West notes about Hesiod’s encounter, visions

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204 Mourelatos 1970, 255.
208 Gallop 1984, 6-7; KRS 1995, 243-244.
often naturally conform to one’s beliefs and expectations.\textsuperscript{209} Perhaps more telling is the ambiguity and vagueness found in the proem: why doesn’t Parmenides name the goddess? It is rare for the epic poets not to name the specific god or goddess in the narration; usually the singular form of \textit{ζεύς} is employed by characters within the poem who are unaware of the specific source of divine presence or interference.\textsuperscript{210} It is highly unlikely, however, that ignorance is the cause for the knowledgeable (\textit{εἰδότα φῶτα}, B1.3) narrator’s withholding of the name. Taran argues that the goddess’ anonymity “shows that she represents no religious figure at all and only stands as a literary device implying that the ‘revelation’ is the truth discovered by Parmenides himself.”\textsuperscript{211} This interpretation, however, seems both to overemphasize the individual agency of the narrator and to underestimate the significance of the divine source for most of the poem.

The journey of the narrator incorporates both active and passive elements. Unlike Hesiod, he is not approached by the goddess but instead travels to her abode; that the speaker ventures beyond the limits of the mortal world suggests that the quest for truth is an active and deliberate enterprise. The language of the proem, however, suggests a more passive role in this trip: that the speaker is being carried is repeated four times in the first four lines and in each case he is either the direct object (\textit{ἵπποι ταί με φέρουσιν}, \textit{φέρει εἰδότα φῶτα}; \textit{με πολύφραστοι φέρον ἰπποί}) or the subject of a passive verb (\textit{τῆι φερόμην}). It is the horses who put him on the journey (B1.2), it is the Heliades who persuade Dike to open the gates (B1.15), and it is the goddess who, without being asked, delivers the accounts of

\textsuperscript{209} West 1966, \textit{ad} 23-34.

\textsuperscript{210} Else 1949, 26.

\textsuperscript{211} Taran 1965, 31. He adds that the nameless goddess serves as emphasis for “the objectivity of (Parmenides’) method.”
Being and opinion. Unlike Xenophanes, Parmenides does not provide significant biographical data for his narrator; the only information we can glean from the poem is that the speaker is a young man (κοῦρ, B1.24) and that he is in some way knowledgeable (εἰδότα φῶτα, B1.3). The lack of personal information is in some ways similar to the anonymity of the bard found in the works Homer; although Parmenides uses the first person to describe the revelation, the journey and the lessons found at the end of it seem accessible not only to one individual but to the class of those “in the know” (εἰδότα φῶτα, B1.3). Although Taran argues that presence of the goddess is merely a literary device and that the truth of Parmenides’ account rests solely upon logical demonstration, there is not necessarily an exclusive division between the method with which one obtains knowledge and the divine source of knowledge. As we have seen in Homer, humans and gods share the same method of acquiring knowledge (i.e. sense perception), but the gods are still an important source of information because their faculties of perception far exceed those of humans. Parmenides offers a different method for investigating truth than that found in Homer and Xenophanes, but the presence of the goddess may serve a function very similar to the one performed by the gods in Homer: through powers available to men, she transmits to them knowledge previously unavailable to them because of human limitations. The goddess may be metaphorical, but nonetheless she bears a special significance in delivering the innovative understanding of truth. The

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212 Mourelatos (1970, 16) refers to the narrator as Kouros, and not Parmenides, because of this lack of biographical data.

213 Bowra (1937, 109) argues that this is an allusion to an initiate in cult practice; this would fit with the image of supernatural journeying, but this interpretation relies too heavily on a religious implication for the participle εἰδώς.

214 Taran 1965, 28.
divine origin of these accounts, therefore, plays an important role along with the logical argumentation in Parmenides’ poetic authority.

Reliance on a divine source is a traditional poetic element in Parmenides’ work, though the information communicated is quite radical. One last question I wish to examine is to what extent can Parmenides’ poem be read as part of the poetic tradition: how does his work fit with those of other poets? Xenophanes rejected the immoral and anthropomorphic elements found in the epic presentation of the gods but retained other values, such as an ethical conception of the divine, the experiential basis for knowledge, and the use of a poetic persona. Parmenides does not mention other poets by name or in general, but the language and imagery found in his work has led scholars to draw comparisons with his epic predecessors and with contemporary poets. Some have compared the journey motif found in Parmenides’ poem with the theme of homecoming found in the *Odyssey*. Others note the similarities between the beginning of the goddess’ speech (B1.24-32) and the Muses’ report to Hesiod in *Theogony* 26-28, as well as between Parmenides’ gates of Night and Day (B1.11-20) and Hesiod’s gates of Tartarus (*Th.* 736-757). Bowra notes that the image of the chariot is frequently found in other poems, notably in those of Pindar, as a metaphor for poetry. Parmenides’ incorporation of these images and motifs suggests that this poem is constructed as part of the same poetic tradition as that of Homer, Hesiod, and later authors such as Pindar. The content of the poem, however, is radically different: no previous poem champions the same logical criteria or purely abstract concept of reality. Why then does Parmenides fill

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216 Dolin 1962, Jaeger 1936, 93-94.

217 E.g. *Ol.* 6.22-28; Bowra 1937, 100-102.
his poem with traditional images and motifs that are bound to draw comparisons with his poetic predecessors? Is he, like Xenophanes, correcting these earlier models, albeit through more allusive and less explicit language? Jaeger argues that this is indeed the case:

…how could the Greeks, with their fondness for any sort of contest, have helped seeing in Parmenides’ adoption of the verse-form of his venerable theological predecessor [Hesiod] an avowed intention to compete with him on his own territory, however sharply the rigorous conceptual deductions of the Eleatic must have contrasted with Hesiod’s fanciful mythopoeia?

While these allusions to earlier poets could be polemical, it is also possible that Parmenides is using them for a less aggressive reason; Mourelatos suggests that although he had a different purpose than the epic poets, Parmenides used their language, images, motifs to “think new thoughts in and through them.” Just as one uses a known object as a metaphor for an unknown one in order explain a new concept, so Parmenides uses a familiar model to explain an unfamiliar one. The epic form would then be a clear and meaningful way of expressing thoughts that were wholly untraditional. Unfortunately, Parmenides does not make a clear programmatic statement concerning his choice to write in traditional epic hexameter.

Perhaps the most explicit comment Parmenides makes about the poetic form of his work is the goddess’ remark before she begins her account of the δόξαι:

δόξας δ' ἀπὸ τοῦτο βρατείας
μάνθανε κόσμον ἐμῶν ἐπέων ἀπατηλὸν ἄκουών. (B8.51-52)

What exactly does he mean by “the deceptive order of my words” (κόσμον ἐμῶν ἐπέων ἀπατηλὸν)? The most immediate interpretation in this context is that he is labeling the “conceptual scheme” (κόσμον) of the world of appearances found within the goddess’

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speech as false. But could there also be an allusion to a formal aspect of the poem itself? The terms κόσμος and the plural ἔπη are frequently used to describe the arrangement of poetry and poetry itself (particularly the epic genre). The phrase κόσμος ἔπεων is found in Solon, where he contrasts the poetic form of his offering with that of a speech (κόσμον ἔπεων ἡ ἡμῶν ἀντί ἀγορᾶς Σέμενος, 1.2, West). Furthermore, as I discussed in my second chapter, κόσμος is in epic often associated with truth: to speak κατὰ κόσμον is, among other things, to give an accurate account (Od. 8.489), and the veracity of a speech is frequently judged by its formal qualities (μορφὴ ἔπεων, Od. 11.367). The phrase κόσμον ἀπατηλόν can thus have more than one meaning in reference to his poetic form: Parmenides could be suggesting that the verbal arrangement of false δόξαι is deliberately ambiguous or contradictory, or he could be implying that this account has an attractive and plausible form despite its falsity; these interpretations, however, need not be exclusive. In either case Parmenides’ acknowledgement of the deceptive form of his second account serves as a warning to his audience: one must judge an argument by reason (κρῖναι δὲ λόγωι, B7) and not be deceived by false accounts, however attractive and plausible they may seem. Although poetry is a useful vehicle for his ideas, he concedes that it has the capacity for deception.

Like Parmenides, Xenophanes uses traditional poetic elements to bolster his innovative ideas. Xenophanes, however, seems more conscious of his place within the poetic tradition: he develops ideas found within the epic poems while at the same time

219 Mourelatos 1970, 221.
220 Cf. Taran 1965, 221 n. 50.
222 KRS 1995, 254-255.
criticizing the epic poets for their tendency to misrepresent the gods. While Parmenides uses language and images found in epic poetry, his abstract concept of Being seems far removed from the ideas found in the genre. His criterion for truth is logical necessity, which is free both from the concerns for propriety found in Homer and the emphasis on seemliness found in Xenophanes (B1, B26)\textsuperscript{223} and from the experiential basis for knowledge found in both authors. Nonetheless, Parmenides’ claim to divine authority is one remarkably traditional element not found in the work of Xenophanes. The prominence of a goddess in the poem, as in the works of Homer and Hesiod, adds credibility and significance to information far removed from human experience. The remoteness of this knowledge is not, however, due to a spatial or temporal separation, as it is in epic poetry, but rather to the discovery of a logical abstraction fundamentally in conflict with human experience: the world is not as it appears.

**Pindar**

Pindar, like Parmenides, also composes poetry about matters beyond the normal limits of the human world. The content of Pindar’s poetry, however, focuses on traditional myths rather than on abstract logical distinctions. Unlike Xenophanes and Parmenides, he does not explicitly attempt to shift the way in which his listeners view the world; rather, his epinician odes draw material from the world of gods and the mythological past in order to praise athletic victors. Although this generic distinction is important, the manner in which Pindar treats both this mythological material and his poetic predecessors reveals that his own attitude towards truth and authority are in some

\textsuperscript{223} Parmenides does, however, attach moral significance to his arguments. As Bowra (1937, 107-108) notes, the goddess clearly and emphatically associates her concept of truth with Dike and Themis. This ethical dimension to Parmenides’ poetry is, on the surface, quite traditional, but his appropriation of ethical language in reference to logical necessity rather than proper conduct towards others is unorthodox.
ways similar to that of Xenophanes. Like Xenophanes, Pindar occasionally corrects mythological accounts found in earlier poems. I will discuss two examples of such correction: the story of Pelops in Olympian 1.25-94 and the defense of Ajax in Nemean 7.20-27. I will argue that in these passages as well as others one can find a conception of truth that incorporates personal experience, but ultimately privileges concerns for propriety. Pindar adopts several epic values in a manner similar to that of Xenophanes, but he relies more on the traditional forms of authority, especially on a connection with the world of the divine, than Xenophanes does.

The first Olympian ode, written in praise of Hieron, contains the story of Pelops as its centerpiece. Pindar does not merely tell his version of the tale, he also corrects the accounts of his predecessors: according to him, Pelops was not cooked and partly eaten, as others say, but rather abducted by Poseidon. After indicating that Pelop’s shoulder was ivory from birth, Pindar remarks about the deceptive nature of poetic accounts:

The contrast between the true account (τὸν ἀλαθῆ λόγον) and stories embellished with various lies (δεδαιδαλμένοι ψεῦδεσι ποικίλοις μῦθοι) highlights the tendency for poets to exaggerate their claims. The term for true, ἀλαθῆ, refers to what actually happened (i.e. historical accuracy), whereas the lies (ψεῦδεσι) are exaggerations or complete falsehoods (i.e. literary fabrications). The grace of poetry (Χάρις) leads men to believe in what would
otherwise be implausible (ἄπιστον ἐμήσατο πιστόν), an idea reminiscent of Hesiod’s ψεύδεα ἔτυμοισιν ὁμοία (Th. 27) and Parmenides’ κόσμος ἀπατηλός (B8.52). These two authors cite divine revelations as tokens for the validity of their accounts; what does Pindar offer to his audience to vouch for his version of this story? There are two significant elements behind his claim: the presence (or lack) of eyewitnesses and the standard of seemliness.

Visual observation is championed in the works of Homer and Xenophanes as a sure criterion for knowledge, whereas in Parmenides the senses are untrustworthy gauges of truth. Pindar occasionally refers to his own eyewitness testimony when referring to a victor’s accomplishment; for example, he claims that he will bear witness (μαρτυρήσω) for the good character of Hagesias of Syracuse (Ol. 6.21). The implication of μάρτυς and related words is not only a legal connotation, but also claim to first hand experience; as Most has noted, these terms are “limited in meaning to those whose knowledge of an event is dependent upon their having been present for it.”

Pindar seems more reluctant to claim experiential knowledge for events in the mythical past, although he will cite relevant witnesses if they exist. In the case of Pelops, and more generally the tendency of poetry to embellish, Pindar claims that the remaining days (ἁμέραι ἐπίλοιποι) prove to be the wisest witnesses. What precisely does this statement mean? In other poems Pindar refers to the importance of time for understanding truth; for example, Χρόνος is called the “only tester of genuine truth” (ἐξελέγχων μόνος ἀλάθειαν ἐτήτυμον, Ol. 10.53-55). While the sentiment in that passage – that the truth becomes evident only after time has elapsed

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224 Most 1985, 177.

225 Most 1985, 176-177; Pratt 1993, 123-124.

226 E.g. Apollo is no false witness (οὐ ψεύδις ὁ μάρτυς) for the deeds of Neoptolemus, since his glory at Delphi remains steadfast (Nem. 7.49).
– seems clear enough, it is unclear how knowledge of the true story of Pelops will emerge by virtue of time: wouldn’t the passing of time only further confuse the nature of an event in the mythological past rather than clarify it?\textsuperscript{227} The future days will not, in fact, be witnesses for the exact account of what happened, which Xenophanes calls τὸ σαφές; on the contrary, the future time apparently will prove what men accept to be true and believable. Just as Apollo and Delphi serve as witnesses for the glory of Neoptolemus (\textit{Nem.} 7.43-49), so Pindar has confidence that the reputation of Pelops, presumably the noble version supported by himself, will remain intact in the future and its proliferation will vouch for its authenticity. Despite the presence of slanderous rumors, he seems to have faith that the truth will ultimately prevail among humans.\textsuperscript{228} He here uses the language of witness (μάρτυρες) as an indicator of truth, but this type of observation is much different from the empirical standards of Xenophanes, for whom the truth (τὸ σαφές) is something seen first hand and not verified by common reception.

The more emphatic claim behind Pindar’s version of the Pelops myth is that he is presenting a more appropriate and seemly account than the cannibalistic one delivered by others. After his comment on the testimony of future days, he remarks that it is appropriate (ἐοικός) for men to speak fine things (καλά) about the gods. The opposition between true and false accounts is ultimately resolved by a consideration of what is seemly. After he summarizes the slanderous account devised by envious neighbors, Pindar does not immediately label this version as false; instead he notes his inability

\textsuperscript{227} Pratt 1993, 124-125.


\[ ἀ' ἄλλη διάφορα ἀλεξιά ϕελει υπ-\]

\[ κάμ, ὃ τε παθά[μα]τω[θ] ἐχρέ-\]

\[ νος τὸ καλός\]

\[ ζήγ[α]μον αὐν ἀλήξα... \]
(ἄπορα) to call any of the gods gluttonous and demonstrates his repulsion with the abrupt ἀφίσταμαι (Ol. 1.52). In his remarks about propriety, he seems especially interested in the repercussions of slanderous or blasphemous speech. After his comment about seemly (ἐοικός) and fine (καλά) speech, he notes that this typically incurs less blame (αἰτία).

Similarly, after his vow to stand apart, he claims that slanderers receive poverty as punishment. While he is likely posing his version of this myth as the true account, his focus on piety and appropriate speech is given precedence in his explanation for rejecting the traditional story.

One can see his concern for propriety in other passages as well. When he mentions Heracles’ struggles with the other immortals, Pindar commands his mouth to cease hateful and inappropriate (παρὰ καιρόν) abuse (Ol. 9.35-39); he does not correct the story, nor does he give any indication that it is in fact false, but quickly changes topic because, like Xenophanes (B1.21-23), he feels conflict among the immortals is unseemly.

The exact truth is not always a priority for Pindar, especially when it conflicts with the standards of propriety. He notes in Nemean 5 that it is not always profitable for the whole truth (ἄπασα ἀλάθει) to reveal itself exactly (ἀτρεκές,16-18). But the concepts of truth and seemliness are not always in conflict. Pindar seems to associate truth, at least concerning the gods, with piety. In Pythian 3 he notes:

εἰ δὲ νόρω τις ἔχει θνατῶν ἀλαθείας ὁδόν, χρὴ πρὸς μακάρων τυχάνοντ' εὐ παρχέμεν. (Pyth. 3.103-104)

The implication of this passage is that keeping to the way of truth (ἀλαθείας ὁδόν) entails modestly accepting what the gods have given rather than impiously attempting to subvert the will of the gods, as Asclepius does earlier in the poem by reviving the dead and

229 Gildersleeve (1885 ad loc.) notes that asyndeton is often used to express repugnance.
violating τὰ ἔοικότα (55-60). Pindar’s conception of propriety is then much like Homer’s formulation of κόσμος: though occasionally accuracy and seemliness conflict, normally the two overlap and the appropriate often dictates what can be considered true about the gods.

One major point of contention between Pindar and Homer is the treatment of the epic heroes Ajax and Odysseus. Pindar is highly critical of Odysseus’ slander and treachery (*Nem*. 8.20-34) and claims that Ajax has been treated unfairly in the works of Homer:

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ἐγὼ δὲ πλέον ‘ἔλπομαι λόγον Ὄδυσσεος ἢ πάξαν διὰ τὸν ἁδυεπῆ γενέσθε Ὥμηρον.
ἐπι ψεύδεσθι οἱ ποταμί <τε> μαχανί.
σεμνὸν ἐπιστή ποιήσεις μᾶλλον παρά γεγονός.
ὑπέρ ἄμμον ἀνδρῶν ὁ πλεῖστος.
εἰ γὰρ φαν
ἐ τὰν ἅλαϑειαν ἑδέμεν, οὐ κεν ὀπλῶν ὁλοκληρωθεῖς
ὁ παρατηρός "Ajax ἕπαξε διὰ φρενῶν
λευφόν ἔφω=" (Nem. 7.20-27)
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This critique, like the one in *Olympian* 1, highlights the tendency for poetic exaggeration. Pindar claims the sweet sound (ἁδυεπῆ), skill (σοφία), and majesty (σεμνὸν) of Homer have conferred upon Odysseus a greater account than he deserves. This criticism, like the previous one, includes both a visual aspect and a proprietary element to truth. Pindar uses the motifs of sight and blindness to express the unjust treatment of Ajax in the works of Homer; he claims that most men have blind hearts (τυφλὸν ἦτορ), for if they could see the truth (τὰν ἅλαϑειαν ἑδέμεν) the fate of Ajax would have played out differently. The superiority of Ajax is here depicted as a visually evident fact that men failed to notice because of their own blindness. There is an interesting juxtaposition between those within the story who should have seen the glory of Ajax and those outside the tale who are deceived by Homer’s sweet words. The effect is that Pindar’s version is aligned with
autopsy whereas Homer’s account is reduced to deceptive words (ψεύδεσι). Both versions, however, are outside the realm of the author’s experience; although Pindar references “seeing the truth,” his account has no more empiric weight than that of Homer. The language of autopsy is primarily figurative (as the phrase “blind heart” might suggest) but it emphasizes the strength of the poet’s conviction that the hero is not receiving his due. The proprietary concerns in this passage are not about pious or ethical behavior, but rather about the proper allocation of praise and blame. In other passages Pindar uses the term καιρός to refer to restrained and reverent commentary about the gods (Ol. 9.38) as well as to proper acknowledgement of men’s achievements: he notes in Pythian 9 the importance of καιρός in reporting μεγάλαι ἀρεταί (76-79). Here the ἀρεταί of Ajax are his feats in battle, in which no other hero save Achilles can compare – a point that Homer himself frequently makes.  

One last feature I would like to discuss is the relationship of Pindar’s poetry to the world of the divine: does Pindar, like his epic predecessors as well as Parmenides, make a claim to personal communication with the gods? Although he does not present any incidents as vivid as Hesiod’s encounter with the Muses or Parmenides’ supernatural journey, Pindar frequently refers to the Muses as sources and allies in the poetic process. For example, in Olympian 3 he remarks tentatively (ποι) that a Muse stood beside him as he formed his poem in Doric meter (4-9). That the Muses provide him with information otherwise unattainable to mortal men seems evident in Paean 6:

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\begin{align*}
\text{ταῦτα θεοὶ [μ]έν} \\
\text{ποιεῖν σοφοὶ[ς] δυνατόν,} \\
\text{βροτοῖν δ’ ἀμάχαινον εἰςρέμεν.} \\
\text{ἀλλὰ παρθένοι γάρ, ἵστ[ς] ὅτι[ς], Μο[ι]σαί,} \\
\text{πάντα, κα[λαι]νεφεὶ σὺν}
\end{align*}
\]

230 E.g. Il. 2.768-769, 17.279-280.
The passage is reminiscent of the invocation at *Iliad* 2.484-494: the Muses, the daughters of Zeus who know all (ἳσθ’ ὅτι, Μολῆσαι, / πάντα), deliver select portions of their knowledge to humans who could not achieve them on their own. Furthermore, The Muses are frequently connected with the notion of truth in Pindar’s poetry; in *Olympian* 10, the Muse and Ἀλάδια, another daughter of Zeus, are responsible for ensuring the poem owed to Hagesidamos is completed. He also notes that the Muse becomes more eminent through correct reports (ἀγγελίας ὀρθᾶς, *Pyth.* 4.279). Inspiration from the Muses is thus an important part of Pindar’s claim to poetic authority on matters beyond human experience.

The Muses are not always, however, dispensers of information, as they often are in the works of Homer. In *Olympian* 6, Pindar remarks that he can personally attest to good character of Hagesias, and that the Muses will aid him (17-21); the Muses here are assistants in the shaping of material familiar to the poet, rather than teachers or sources of information. In *Pythian* 10, the poet guides the chariot of the Muses which has been provided his patron (64-66). Unlike the young man in Parmenides’ first fragment, the poet (and his patron) is portrayed actively (ἄγων ἄγοντα). The inspiration from the Muses provides the power (horses), but the chariot is ultimately guided by the poet. The inclusion of personal testimony (*Ol.* 6.17-21) and descriptions of the poet’s guiding role

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231 Though, as Murray (1981, 95) notes, the Muses also play an important role for the performance of the poem in Homer and the epic tradition.

232 Cf. Simpson 1969 for more examples of the chariot metaphor in the poems of Pindar.

in the poetic process demonstrate that Pindar, like Hesiod in *Works and Days*, can draw on personal experience as well as divine inspiration received from the Muses.

Pindar’s incorporation of seemliness and autopsy found in his rejection of mythological accounts is similar to Xenophanes’ approach. Unlike Xenophanes, however, Pindar does not completely reject the tradition of poetic inspiration; like Hesiod, he incorporates a personal element as an important component of his authority along with divine inspiration. His conception of truth includes historical accuracy, but the concept of seemliness often dictates whether this truth ought to be said; as he notes in *Nemean* 5.16-18, the truth should not always be reported. Whereas Xenophanes seems frustrated at the lack of clear and certain truth (τὸ σαφές), he does not resort to claims of poetic inspiration, nor does he ever explicitly subordinate the factual truth to what is seemly. Though seemliness is, of course, an important part of Xenophanes’ theological pronouncements, he does not appear to see any conflict between propriety and truth.

Although both authors demonstrate a keen interest in the gods and the definitions of piety, Pindar’s approach is much more traditional. His view of human success ultimately depends on the goodwill of the gods, who fulfill men’s prayers in return for piety (*Ol.* 8.8-14) and punish men for their impiety (*Ol.* 1.35, 53). Xenophanes sees a sharp divide between divine communication and human investigative enterprise, and champions the latter as the better mode for understanding the world, inasmuch as he believes that the gods have never communicated with mortals (B18). Even in his most traditional poems, he does not pray for tangible benefits, such as athletic victories, from the gods but instead asks for the ability to act justly (B1.15-16). Unlike Pindar and Hesiod, Xenophanes does not see pious and virtuous behavior as a means for obtaining
divine favor, but rather as an end of itself for which men should pray. His conception of
the divine, though influenced by the ethical considerations of Hesiod, is removed from
human experience, since his god neither communicates directly with mortals nor
(apparently) offers immediate tangible rewards for human piety. Nevertheless, he sees his
god as compatible with the poetic and religious traditions, as well as with the intellectual
emphasis of contemporary thinkers. While Parmenides’ abstract and logical account of
existence seems quite incompatible with previous modes of Greek thought, Xenophanes
manages to present an account of the divine that is less radical and abstract than that of
Parmenides, as well as more innovative and provocative than Pindar’s largely traditional
theology. He accomplishes this feat by incorporating into his writing both traditional
elements that would be familiar to his audience and more radical comments supported by
empirical observations and inferences drawn from them. Through this balance he
maintains poetic authority even though he – unlike Homer, Hesiod, Parmenides, and
Pindar – does not claim any immediate access to the gods or the Muses.
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