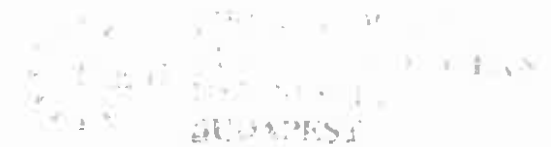


"It's called monotheism, but it looks like downsizing to me."

ONE GOD OR MANY?

CONCEPTS OF DIVINITY IN
THE ANCIENT WORLD

edited by
BARBARA NEVLING PORTER



Transactions of the Casco Bay Assyriological Institute

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About the Cover:

Top: The God of Israelite tradition, as pictured in the etching "God Appearing in the Whirlwind" by William Blake. *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, pl. 13 (copyright The British Museum, used by permission).

At One O'Clock: A "pillar-figure," identified by some scholars with the mysterious entity referred to as an *asherah* in biblical texts. These figurines, frequently found in Israelite sites from the Iron Age, have been argued to represent alternatively a goddess of fertility, a female consort of the Israelite god, or an emanation of that god. Found at Lachish, Iron II level (From Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, trans. T.H. Frapp [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, and Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1998], fig. 321, p. 327. Based on the photo in Olga Tufnell, *Lachish III (Tell ed-Duweir), The Iron Age* [London: 1953], pl. 21:10.) The Hebrew quotation reads, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

At Three O'Clock: The god Assur, referred to in Assyrian texts as "king of the gods," as pictured on a glazed brick panel found in a private house in the city of Assur, 9th–7th centuries BCE, now in the collections of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum (original drawing by Marion Cox). The quotation, written in Assyrian cuneiform, reads, "...his gods (and) his goddesses..." (from the royal inscriptions of Esarhaddon, R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Assarhaddons Königs von Assyrien* [Graz: 1956], Babylon E, Ep. 8b, p. 14).

At Seven O'Clock: The goddess Isis Panthea, or "Isis-all-the-gods," as pictured in a statuette now in the collections of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, England (original drawing by Marion Cox). The Greek quotation reads, "One God, among gods and men (the) greatest" (Xenophanes, Fragment 23).

At Nine O'Clock: Thoth, an Egyptian god of wisdom associated with the moon (original drawing by Marion Cox). The quotation, written in Egyptian hieroglyphics, reads, "All gods are three: Amun, Re, Ptah" (from the "Leiden Hymn to Amun," ms. about 1250 BCE).

Frontispiece:

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- RdE: *Revue d'Égyptologie* (Paris: various publishers, 1933-)
- SAK: *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* (Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 1974-)
- WAW: Society of Biblical Literature: *Writings from the Ancient World* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990-)
- ZAS: *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* (various places and publishers, 1863-)
- Zandee, *De hymnen aan Amon*: Jan Zandee, *De hymnen aan Amon van Papyrus Leiden I 350* (= *Oudheidkundige Mededelingen uit het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden* 28, Leiden, 1947)



THRICE ONE THREE GREEK EXPERIMENTS IN ONENESS¹

H. S. Versnel

No man knows, or ever will know, the truth about the gods and about everything I speak of: for even if one chanced to say the complete truth, yet oneself knows it not: but seeming is wrought over all things.

Xenophanes

COSMOS OR CHAOS? AN INTRODUCTION

Ancient Greek religion was pervasively polytheistic, to both the awe and the distress of the mortal observers. Homer (*Il.*, 20.4–9)² describes how an infinite number of gods come to the assembly on Olympus, including all the rivers and all the nymphs. From a different perspective, Thales (early sixth century BCE) claimed that “everything is full of gods,” and, again in another context, his older contemporary Hesiod (*Op.*, 252f.) claims that no fewer than 30,000 (probably meaning, “thrice countless,” which is *very* many indeed) divine assistants of Zeus are watching over judgments and evil deeds.³ He is rapped over the

1. This title is both an indication of what this paper is about and an allusion to my book *TER UNUS. Isis, Dionysos, Hermes: Three Studies in Henotheism* (Leiden, 1991). Section III leans heavily on this book. I here wish to express my deep gratitude to Barbara Porter for her scrutiny to try to clear my text from flaws and barbarisms in the English and even more for her acute comments on lack of clarity in argument or composition as well as for her numerous suggestions for improvement.

2. Abbreviated names of classical works used here follow the system of *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford, 1996).

3. The same number is mentioned centuries later by the Cynic Oinomaos *apud* Eusebius (*Præp. ev.*, 5.36.2), concerning the total number of idols in his time.

knuckles more than a millennium later by Prudentius (*Apophthegmata* 453), who scorns Julian the Apostate for worshipping three hundred thousand gods (*amans tercentum milia divum*).⁴ Although the latter two pronouncements are both deliberate exaggerations produced for the sake of argument, they are nonetheless indicative of the way Greeks (and Romans) envisaged their polytheistic cosmology. Hence, we should not be surprised that polytheistic Greeks (and Romans) found their pantheon at times confusing, particularly when it came to selecting the most promising god to approach in dealing with a particular problem.⁵ Modern theory notwithstanding,⁶ the supposedly obvious specializations of the major gods did little to guide human beings who found themselves in doubt about the most appropriate god to whom to pray or sacrifice. The oracle of Zeus Naïos and Dione at Dodona in Northwestern Greece, for instance, specialized in questions that included the formula: "To which of the gods (and heroes) must I pray

Admittedly this is a collective of anonymous gods. Although Greek religion is "unashamedly polytheistic" (Rowe 1980, p. 51) I doubt if the Greek pantheon counts as many named gods as the Akkadian one, where P. Deimel, *Pantheon Babylonium* (Rome, 1914, rpt. 1950) counts 3,300, and K. Tallquist, *Akkadische Gotterepitheta* (Helsinki, 1938), 2,400 divine names. And compare the grand total of 1,218 gods in one inscription and 1,970 divine names in AN = Anum as mentioned in Barbara Porter's contribution to this volume.

4. As E. Bickerman noticed in *JHPh*, 95 (1974), p. 369, n. 31, who also refers to an observation by Petronius that the city of Cumae has more immortal than mortal inhabitants: "Anonymous Gods," *JWI*, 1 (1937-38), p. 187.

5. For this see also: Gladigow 1983 and 1990.

6. One instance out of many: Brelich 1960, p. 130: "so bedenke man, dass schon das Gebet ... durch seine verschiedenen Inhalte im Polytheismus untrennbar ist von der Differenzierung der Wirkungssphären der Gottheiten, an die man sich wendet: dagegen erbittet man von einem einzigen Gott ... unterschiedslos alles, was man braucht: Gesundheit, Fruchtbarkeit, Erfolg in der Wirtschaft und in dem Krieg, Schutz bei Gefahren...." This is a theoretical differentiation that does not stand up to the evidence concerning prayer in a polytheistic context. Accordingly, at p. 132, we find a reservation: "Die grossen Gottheiten selbst entsprechen nicht immer dem polytheistischen Ideal." However, the argumentation is deficient and needs a thorough reconsideration.

and/or sacrifice in order to..." (followed by the wish). From this oracle we have no examples of a response to this particular type of question, and the few we do have from the far more renowned oracle of Delphi may have been clear to the local priesthood, but were hardly so to the people who had asked the question. Here is an example: "You must pray to Zeus, to Hera of the Kithairon, to Pan and the Sphragitic Nymphs, and sacrifice to the heroes Androkrates, Leukon, Peisandros, Damokrates, Hypsion, Aktaion, Polyeidon."⁷ Other oracle instructions from Delphi add, "and to all the Olympian gods and goddesses," thus adopting a routine formula of prayers in general. In a discussion on prayer, Plato (*Symp.* 180E) gives the advice, "One must praise all the gods." And numerous Greek and even more Latin inscriptions confirm the currency of this thought. *Ceteris dis deabusque* ('and to the other gods and goddesses') added to one or more named gods is formulaic in Latin votive inscriptions. In short, hesitant and dubitative formulas abound in an astounding—and significant—variety: "Zeus, or by whatever (other) name you wish to be invoked"; "listen to me, lord, whoever you may be"; "whether god or goddess," these are only a few of the most common expressions. The latter, characteristically Latin, expression *sive deus, sive dea*,⁸ even seems to amalgamate into the name of a new god, which, if so, should be written *Sivedeussivedea*. Doubt deified.

Humans—and I understand this category as including both ancient Greeks and modern Hellenists—generally dislike uncertainty and doubt. On the nature of Greek polytheism, however, doubts among modern

7. Plut. (*Vita Arist.* 11.3), who explains to the non-initiated that at least some of these gods and heroes belonged to the pantheon of Plataea, where the battle to which the oracle referred was to take place. Likewise at festivals of the gods, sacrifice is often made not to one god, but to a whole series of gods. Sometimes the place and function of each of the participants can be discovered with some effort, at other times this exercise remains without convincing success, which of course does not necessarily imply that there *was* no system to the plurality. See also Burkert 1985, p. 217.

8. J. Alvar, "Matériaux pour l'étude de la formule *sive deus sive dea*," *Numen*, 32 (1985), pp. 237-73.

scholars run rampant: was it chaos or cosmos? Although some modern specialists cannot escape the conclusion that Greek polytheism lacks a transparent structure and is basically, or at the very least potentially, chaotic, this view is censured by others as an intolerable admission of weakness. The dilemma is exemplified in the fundamental difference of opinion between the two most influential scholars of Greek religion of the second part of the last century: Jean-Pierre Vernant and Walter Burkert.

In his Inaugural Lecture to the Chair of Comparative Studies of Ancient Religions at the Collège de France, 1975,⁹ Vernant, speaking about Greek polytheism, formulated what appears to be both his confession of faith and the methodical foundation of his entire scholarly activity:¹⁰

9. From the English translation 'Inaugural Address at the Collège de France', published in: *Social Science Information*, 16 (1977), pp. 5-24, which was reproduced in: J.-P. Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*, edited with an excellent introduction by F. I. Zeitlin (Princeton, 1991), whose pagination I follow for the English quotations. In the translation under discussion (Zeitlin, p. 273), I have made a few alterations.

10. Consequently, similar statements return time and again, e.g. in: J.-P. Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, transl. J. Lloyd (London, 1980), p. IX: "Our remarks on the Greek gods consider the pantheon from two points of view; first as a divine society with its own hierarchy, in which each god enjoys his own particular attributes and privileges, bearing a more or less close, more or less direct relation to the structure of human society; and secondly as a classificatory system, a symbolic language with its own intellectual ends." More balanced in his entry 'Greek Religion' in: M. Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York, 1987), p. 103: "To be sure a Greek god is defined by the set of relationships that unite or put him in opposition to other divinities of the pantheon, but the theological structures brought to light are too numerous and, especially, too diverse to be integrated into the same pattern. According to the city, the sanctuary, or the moment, each god enters into a varied network of combinations with the others. Groups of gods do not conform to a single model that is more important than others; they are organized into a plurality of configurations that do not correspond exactly but compose a table with several entries and many axes, the reading of which varies according to the starting point and the perspective adopted." Of course, especially these programmatic theorematata are adopted as a catechism of sorts by many a disciple, for instance: Bruit-Schmitt 1992, pp. 176ff.

A god is a power that represents a type of action, a kind of force. Within the framework of a pantheon, each of these powers is defined not in itself, as an isolated object, but by virtue of its relative position in the aggregate of forces, by the structure of relations that oppose and unite it to the other powers that constitute the divine universe. The law of this society of the beyond is the strict demarcation of the forces and their hierarchical counterbalancing. This excludes the categories of omnipotence, omniscience, and of infinite power.

The question of *how* he knows all this is answered on the page preceding this passage. It presents another confession of faith, pertaining to the profusion and diversity of myths, including their contradictions and disparities, which according to Vernant have debarred previous scholars from treating them as a whole system:

A scattered and heterogeneous pantheon, a mythology of bits and pieces: if this was the polytheism of the Greeks, how could these men, whose exacting rigor in the realms of intellectual consistency is extolled, have lived their religious life in a kind of chaos?

In *his* confession of faith, to be found in *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche*, published in 1977, Walter Burkert gives the following assessment of Greek polytheism:¹¹

But a polytheistic world of gods is nevertheless potentially chaotic, and not only for the outsider. The distinctive personality of a god is constituted and mediated by at least four different factors: the established local cult with its ritual programme and unique atmosphere, the divine name, the myths told about the named being, and the iconography, especially the cult image. All the same, this complex is easily dissolved, and this makes it quite impossible to write the history of any single god.

Here, then, we have two radically different and apparently incompatible views of Greek polytheism, differing in practically every respect regarding both content and argumentation, most conspicuously, how-

11. From the English edition: Burkert 1985, p. 119.

ever, in the antithesis between cosmos and chaos. This radical difference in the interpretation of the same corpus of evidence by two leading specialists is another indication of the complexity of polytheism. While this fundamental and still unresolved question inevitably lurks in the background of any discussion of Greek polytheism, I have chosen to reserve the question of overall order (or lack of it) for another occasion and to concentrate instead on three strategies developed by the Greeks to negotiate, reconcile, or more generally, cope with the alarming complexity of the divine world—ordered or not. All three strategies are ‘experiments in oneness’, and as such, attempts to redefine a plurality or diversity of phenomena as being basically a unity.

None of these theologies, however, aims at uniting the polytheistic plurality itself into one unifying system or structure. Rather, in each of them, though in curiously different ways, the plurality and multifor- mity of polytheism remains unaffected: ‘the many gods’ do not merge into ‘the one’ nor are they explained as emanations or aspects of the one. Both maintain a more or less independent position in the concep- tual world of the believers. As a matter of fact, my exposition sprouts from a critical reflection concerning the sheer dogmatic modern idea(?) of ‘unity in diversity’—often advanced with more conviction than supporting argument. The axiom, endorsed by a majority of specialists, that the Greeks perceived an underlying unity in the diver- sity of religious phenomena,¹² in fact leaves us with more questions than answers. What, precisely, do scholars *mean* by such an assertion as for instance in the words of Burkert, “the whole is more than the sum

12. Just a few instances out of many: E. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, III (1937), p. 706, “In Griechenland vollends hat die frage, ob ein Gott oder viele Götter, kaum eine Rolle gespielt; ob die göttliche Macht als Einheit oder als Vielheit gedacht wird, ist irrelevant . . .”; Th. Zielinski, *La religion de la Grèce antique* (transl. Paris, 1926), pp. 125f., “dans le domaine divin, l’unité et la multiplicité se confondent”; Rudhardt 1966, p. 355, “ce qui est essentiel au polythéisme, c’est que l’unité du divin et la pluralité des noms ou des figures divines, la pluralité des dieux, ne sont pas senties par eux comme contradictoire.” And so on and so forth. See also below nn. 215f.

of the parts?”¹³ And how would you prove such a general statement? And last but not least, we should inquire *how* the very concepts of unity and plurality relate to each other in Greek perception.¹⁴

The three Greek experiments in ‘oneness’ that I shall discuss differ in their points of departure (in terms of historical setting, intellectual climate and social support), in their cosmological presuppositions and implications, in the nature of the discourse in which they are embedded, and, not least, in their impact on general religious experience. Only one of these experiments—the first—explicitly proclaimed a (more or less) overtly monotheistic theology. None of them solved—probably none endeavoured to solve—the problems haunting polytheism.

Because the terms cannot be avoided in my exposition, it may be expedient at this point to give my very provisional and personal working definitions of monotheism and henotheism¹⁵ in their ‘ideal’ forms. By *monotheism* I shall understand:

the conviction that only one god exists (with the cultic corollary of exclusive worship), while other gods do not, or, if and so far as they do, must be *made* nonexistent, for instance by relegating them beyond the political or cultic horizon of the community and attrib- uting to them the status of powerless, wicked or demonic forces without any (real) significance.

13. Burkert 1985, p. 216.

14. Are the two felt as intrinsically contradictory, as Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* 845 (admittedly pertaining to a different issue) has it: “It could not be that one (*heis*) could be equal to many (*pollois*),” and are we thus confronted with a *coincidentia oppositorum*? Generally, judging from the wealth of studies listed in the following footnotes, I have the impression that the ‘unity and diversity’ polarity—which is not necessarily identical to ‘one and many’—is more fundamentally problematized in studies of Egyptian and Near Eastern religions.

15. Of course one can find hosts of variant definitions and discussions in the relevant entries of the well-known encyclopedias of religion. See, e.g., J. Royce, “Monotheism,” *ERE*, VIII (1915), pp. 817–21; F. Baumgärtel, “Monotheismus und Polytheismus,” *RGG3*, IV (1960), pp. 1109–15; R. Hülsewiesche, “Monotheismus,” *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, VI (1984), pp. 142–46; Th. M. Ludwig, “Monotheism,” in M. Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, X (1987), pp. 68–76.

The paradoxical qualifier in this working definition dramatically exposes the author's doubt about whether one can ever speak of *pure* monotheism except in a few exceptional sectors of Islamic, Jewish,¹⁶ Christian¹⁷ and, more generally, philosophical systems. It is also the result of an attempt to accommodate the concept of monolatry¹⁸ (exclusive worship of one god without explicit denial of the existence of other gods¹⁹)—which is relevant to a very restricted number of religions, most specifically that of Israel²⁰—with the larger and more

16. Primarily in what Morton Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (reprinted London, 1987) called "The Yahweh Alone Party" as practically exclusively represented in the book of Deuteronomy. Elsewhere monotheism is not the correct term for Jewish theology, as among many others most cogently demonstrated by P. Hayman, "Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?" *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 42 (1991), pp. 1–15, who argues that in the angels (cf. P. Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen* [Berlin, 1975]) ancient Canaanite gods continue their existence, often in a rather caustic polemic with Yahweh. He also follows and elaborates on A. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven* (Leiden, 1977) and D. Halperin, *The Faces of the Cherubim* (Tübingen, 1988) in arguing for a 'cooperative dualism' between Yahweh and El at first, while later the place of vice-regent was taken by other powers, such as Michael. See now the stimulating and creative discussion by Steve Geller in this volume.

17. See, for instance, a curious statement by the (not so) very monotheistic Paul, I Corinthians 8:5 (below n. 136). Early Christianity was as precariously monotheistic as was the religion of early Israel. See e.g., MacMullen 1984, index s.v. "monotheism."

18. For an excellent and critical account of the history of monolatry (and henotheism) as technical terms see: R. Mackintosh, "Monolatry and Henotheism," *ERE*, VIII (1915), pp. 810–11. Cf. more recently: Rose 1975, "Exkurs: Henotheismus, Monolatrie, Monotheismus," pp. 9–13.

19. Although in scholarly discussion henotheism and monolatry are often combined (e.g., Chr. Auffarth, "Henotheismus/Monolatrie," in: *HncG*, III [1993] pp. 104–5), in my definition monolatry is *not* "Praktizierung des henotheismus": W. Holsten, "Monolatrie," in: *RGG3*, IV (1960), p. 1106. I rather follow F. Heiler, *Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion* (Stuttgart, 1961), p. 323; Rose 1975, p. 10; and others.

20. Of course, a statement like that made by Brelich 1960, p. 132: "Israel schuf beispielsweise seinen Monotheismus, ohne eine polytheistische Phase zu durchlaufen.... Israel ging unmittelbar von der Verehrung eines höchsten himmlischen Wesens aus, eine Haltung, die für primitive Hirtenvölker charakteristisch ist," has

universally applicable notion of monotheism. Of course, many differentiations, such as 'exclusive', 'pluriform', and 'temporary' monotheism have been proposed.

In accordance with the evidence that I shall present in the third part of my paper, *henotheism*²¹ may be defined as:

the privileged devotion to one god, who is regarded as uniquely superior, while other gods are neither depreciated nor rejected and continue receiving due cultic observance whenever this is ritually required.

While monotheism by definition is supposed to be a permanent and non-intermittent awareness, only coming to an end when the believer loses his monotheistic conviction, henotheism may be either permanent, for instance in a cult group around one god, or restricted to a

become untenable, mainly, but not only, due to the discovery of new evidence. Asherah seems to have inspired scholars with a new spurt of courage that makes them say what is (and was already long) obvious. On the problems concerning the definition of Israelite monotheism in various periods of its history, I have consulted (with one exception): Rose 1975; O. Keel, ed., *Monotheismus im alten Israel und seine Umwelt* (Fribourg, 1980); B. Lang, ed., *Der einzige Gott: Die Geburt des biblischen Monotheismus* (Munich, 1981); E. Haag, ed., *Gott, der einzige: Zur Entstehung des Monotheismus in Israel* (Freiburg, Basel, Wien, 1985); J. H. Tigay, *You Shall Have No Other Gods: Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions* (Atlanta, 1986); E. B. Borowitz, *The Many Meanings of 'God is One'* (New York, 1988, *non vidit*); J. C. de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism* (Leuven, 1990; a second edition with full bibliography is forthcoming); M. S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (San Francisco, 1990); W. Dietrich, M. A. Klopfenstem, ed., *Ein Gott allein? JHWH-Verehrung und biblischer Monotheismus im Kontext der israelitischen und altorientalischen Religionsgeschichte* (Freiburg, Göttingen, 1994). Cf. Steve Geller in this volume.

21. The term '*henotheismus*', first introduced by F. J. W. Schelling in the sense of "relative rudimentary monotheism," was canonized (and used interchangeably with '*kathenotheismus*') by Max Müller in order to indicate, in a polytheistic context, the momentaneous and selective adoration of one god, who, for that specific moment of devotion, is exclusively honored with all available predicates. See: M. Yusa, "Henotheism," in: M. Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, VI (1987), pp. 266–67. For the application of the term in the study of Egyptian religion: Hornung 1971, p. 233.

specific moment in personal adoration.²² For instance, a hymn to one god may be regarded as a henotheistic moment in a polytheistic context. Obviously, these definitions imply that boundaries are fluid. It is even to be feared that they will not suffice to cover the whole spectrum of 'oneness'. The introduction of the paradoxical notion 'non-exclusive monotheism' may help us out of the deadlock.

I. ONE GOD, NEITHER IN FORM NOR IN THOUGHT RESEMBLING MORTAL BEINGS

One god (*Heis theos*) among gods and men, the greatest.
Neither in form nor in thought resembling mortal beings.

This is the astounding proclamation issued around the middle of the sixth century BCE by Xenophanes, who has been lauded as "a paradigm of the Presocratic genius" and "ein Revolutionär des Geistes" on the one hand, and relativized as a person who "would have smiled if he had known that one day he was to be regarded as a theologian," on the other.²³ The statement is as surprising for its revolutionary religious innovation²⁴ as for the inconsistency it conceals. I shall first give a brief sketch of the unique philosophical experiments that formed the prelude to Xenophanes' initiatives. Responding to the multiformity of

22. The latter is basically Max Müller's interpretation of the concept, which is also referred to as affective monotheism. A. van Selms, in: M. A. Beek *et alii*, ed., *Symbolae Biblicae et Mesopotamicae M.Th de Liagre Bohil dedicatae* (Leiden, 1973), pp. 341-48, introduced the term 'temporary henotheism' in an article under the same title. He refers to situations in Mesopotamia and Israel (e.g., Epic of Atrahasis, I, ll. 376-83, and Daniel 6:8) in which it is stipulated that for a certain period of time only one god will receive adoration.

23. Respectively by Barnes 1979, p. 82; K. Ziegler, "Xenophanes von Kolophon, ein Revolutionär des Geistes," *Gymnasium*, 72 (1965), pp. 289-302; Burnet 1930, p. 129.

24. With this I do not want to deny that similar initiatives may have been attempted before in different cultures, for instance in the Near East. See Simo Parpola's essay in this volume. On the other hand, *sub specie aeternitatis* and accordingly neglecting the historical perspective, Feyerabend 1986 denies both the revolutionary innovation and the value of Xenophanes' initiatives.

the cosmos, they postulated one divine principle and/or one (material) origin of everything that is. Viewed against the polymorphous background of the contemporaneous religious representations, these archaic initiatives were indeed a breathtaking venture. Was it for this reason that they remained without effect on the practice of religious life? Throughout this section we shall have to rely on brief fragments, since none of the authors that we shall briefly put on the stage has left complete works.

Anaximander (Miletus, first part of the sixth century) defined the origin and essence of all things as *to apeiron*, the immeasurable. Both infinite and indefinite, this *apeiron* is "immortal and deathless" and encompasses all that is: the conflicting elements, rise and decline, birth and death, the succession of the seasons and that of the worlds. Being the ultimate negation of anthropomorphic representation, the *apeiron* is both the immanent 'material' basis and the governing principle that "enfolds and steers all" the innumerable (successive) worlds. The latter two qualities are expressed by the Greek word *arche*. The former mirror those that traditional religious belief attributed to the gods. This provoked the attribution of the predicate 'divine' to, or rather the identification of the *apeiron* with "the Divine": *to theion* (a neuter). While thus uniting in itself the whole spectrum of major qualities of the Homeric gods, the Divine at the same time transcends their variegated, personal and often capricious nature. The speculative line of this development is perfectly summarized by Jaeger:²⁵ "What happens in Anaximander's argument (and that of his successors in this line) is that the predicate God, or rather the Divine, is transferred from the traditional deities to the first principle of Being (at which they arrived by rational investigation), on the ground that the predicates usually attributed to the gods of Homer and Hesiod are inherent in that principle to a higher

25. Jaeger 1947, p. 204. For a bibliographical survey of studies on Anaximander, see e.g., A. Finkelberg, "Plural Worlds in Anaximander," *AJPh*, 115 (1994), pp. 485-506, esp. pp. 505f.

degree or can be assigned to it with greater certainty."²⁶ In other words, it was physical, not theological, speculation that entailed a new representation of the divine.

Pursuing this revolutionary exercise in speculation, Anaximander's younger compatriot (and probably student) Anaximenes (mid-sixth century) proclaimed air, *aer*, as the original *materia prima*, and claimed that from it originated "all that was, that is, and that will be, gods and things divine." He thus phrases in an explicit manner what is generally regarded as one of the most fundamental contrasts between ancient Near Eastern gods—most conspicuously the One of Israel—and Greek ones. While in the Near Eastern perception, world and man were gods' (or god's) creations, it never occurred to the Greeks to seek shelter under the *Beth* of *Bereshit barah*. Although the Ionian philosophers referred to their prime principle as *arche*, implying the notion of 'beginning', this beginning had no begin.²⁷ It simply *was* (and still *is*), gods no less than men being parts and products of this ever creative *arche*.²⁸

26. Cf. Gerson 1990, p. 11: "The *arche* is divine because it is immortal and indestructible. . . . Anaximander has begun to establish a scientific pathway to the divine by means of causal reasoning and the *a priori* consideration of the nature of a first principle." Jaeger adduces a host of examples of later philosophy in which exactly the same procedure is applied. The principle, though, is more general. Also outside speculative theory, Greeks tend to use the terms *theos*, *theios* ('god', 'divine') as predicates, which can be attributed as tokens of acknowledgment of, or indeed as an award for, manifest qualities and benefactions, usually associated with the traditional notion of god.

27. Cf. Aristotle *Phys.* 4, 203b7 on the *apeiron* of Anaximander: "the *apeiron* has no beginning. . . . but (this *arche*) is the beginning of the other things."

28. "God is more than man, but he is in no way Creator": P.A. Meijer in: Versnel 1981b, pp. 224–28, esp. p. 225. On the Greek side see: W. K. C. Guthrie, *In the Beginning: Some Greek Views on the Origins of Life and the Early State of Man* (London, 1957); H. Schwabl, "Weltschöpfung," *RI*, Suppl. 9 (1962), pp. 1433–1590. Brehich 1960, p. 127: "Der Hauptunterschied zwischen dem, was wir Gott nennen, wenn wir uns auf das in einer monotheistischen Religion verehrte Wesen beziehen, und einem Gott irgendeiner polytheistischen Religion, besteht in der Transzendenz des einzigen Gottes zur Wirklichkeit, deren Schöpfer er auch ist (und zwar *ex nihilo*); dagegen sind die polytheistischen Gottheiten von der Wirklichkeit menschlicher Erfahrung untrennbar"—a distinction, however, which in this form is at least debatable.

The poet Hesiod, probably a generation before Anaximander, expressed the same idea in a celebrated—and disputed—line (*Op.*, 108), where he promises to reveal "how the gods and mortal men sprang from one source."²⁹ Accordingly, Greek gods as a rule did not create—neither cosmos nor (human) life.³⁰

The *arche* from which "gods and things divine" sprang, was divine itself. There is a paradox looming here, which is often supposed to have originated in Anaximenes' attempt to find a compromise between his philosophical concept of one superior divine essence and traditional forms of religious expression. The next step then is to explain it away in terms of hierarchy: "Such gods as there were in the world were themselves derived from the all-encompassing air, which was truly divine."³¹ However, since the same paradox returns with even more vigor in the work of the next great Ionian thinker, Xenophanes, it deserves a bit more attention.

Xenophanes

Around 540 BCE the Ionian philosopher Xenophanes of Colophon, whom we met briefly at the beginning of this section,³² wrote the

29. Or "started on the same terms," as M. West prefers in his commentary on *Works and Days* (Oxford, 1978), *ad loc.*

30. Significantly, the one and only exception to this rule was a foreboding of disaster heralding the end of a precultural Utopian Golden Time. The creation of the prototypical woman Pandora—through a rare act of divine cooperation—was expressly devised to seal the separation of men and gods. Formerly gods and men had lived in a kind of commensality, their lives being described in similar terms. "At that time men lived in ease (*hêsuchoi*)," writes Hesiod, while *reia zoantes* ('living easily') is the stereotyped predicate of gods in early Greek poetry. This commensality, these equal terms, are what West recognizes in verse 108.

31. KRS, 150.

32. The basic edition and standard for the numeration of his fragments as well as of those of all other Presocratic philosophers is: H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin, 19516, cited as D-K). Fundamental also: G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge, 19832, cited as KRS), with English translations. The Greek texts

following phrase (Fr. 15): "If horses or oxen or lions had hands and could make drawings with their hands and accomplish such works as men, horses would draw the figures of gods as similar to horses, and oxen as similar to oxen, and they would lend them a physical appearance like their own." And in order to make himself perfectly clear he also said (Fr. 11): "It was Homer and Hesiod who attributed to the gods all sorts of things that are matters of reproach and censure among men: theft, adultery, and mutual deceit." This is the ultimate consequence of the revolution initiated by his predecessors and as such, the earliest proclamation of the notion of religious projection as it was fundamentally formulated 2,400 years later by Feuerbach.

In his violent revolt against the excrescences of anthropomorphic polytheism,³³ Xenophanes postulated one supreme Deity, who was completely immovable, unimaginable, and predominantly characterized as (having) a Great Mind (*Nous*), swaying the universe through thought alone. The influence of his predecessors is unmistakable, but the two major components of his theological system—the rejection of anthropomorphism and the embracing of one abstract divinity—are drawn with far more rigor and explicitness. Consequently, after this momentous initiative the reader cannot but be shocked when he is confronted with another—the most influential—of Xenophanes' postulates, already quoted in the beginning of this section (Fr. 23):³⁴

also in: J. Edmonds, *Greek Elegy and Iambus* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1931), I, pp. 182–215. Separate editions and commentaries on Xenophanes: M. Untersteiner, *Senofane. Testimonianze e frammenti* (Florence, 1956); E. Heitsch, *Xenophanes: Die Fragmente* (Munich and Zurich, 1983) with German translation; J. H. Lesher, *Xenophanes of Colophon. Fragments: A Text and Translation with a Commentary* (Toronto and London, 1992). Two recent annotated bibliographical surveys: L. Paquet, M. Roussel, Y. Lafrance, *Les présocratiques: Bibliographie analytique, 1879–1980*, I (Paris, 1988), pp. 421–43; L. E. Navia, *The Presocratic Philosophers: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York and London, 1993), pp. 619–48.

33. Cf. Fr. 14: "But mortals suppose that gods are born, wear their own clothes and have a voice and body," and Fr. 16: "Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black; Thracians that theirs are blue-eyed and red-haired."

34. Recent years have witnessed the rise of a debate on the authenticity of these

One god among gods and men (the) greatest³⁵
Neither in form nor in thought resembling mortal beings.

This is what I referred to above as a concealed inconsistency. How are we to explain that the first intransigent monist³⁶ of Greek philosophy admits through the back door what he has ousted triumphantly through the front door? How to explain the contradiction, already

lines. For general discussion of the reliability of what later authors have handed down as the *ipsissima verba* of Xenophanes: C. Osborne, *Rethinking Early Greek Philosophy: Hippolytus of Rome and the Presocratics* (Ithaca, 1987), on which see the critical reviews by J. Barnes, *Phronesis*, 33 (1988) pp. 327–44, and A. Mourelatos, *Ancient Philosophy*, 9 (1989), pp. 111–17. More specifically, M. J. Edwards, "Xenophanes Christianus?" *GRBS*, 32 (1991), pp. 219–28, argues that the majority of the verses quoted in the present paper are fabrications by the Christian Clemens. Especially the notion *heis theos* seems suspicious to him, since it does not occur in any other Greek philosopher before Plato, while it is the cornerstone of many Christian and Jewish fabrications of late antiquity (on which see below). I cannot go into this discussion here. Practically no other scholar shares this viewpoint and, anyway, it remains that "to judge by his other doxographers, Xenophanes was not so partial to *heis* as to *hen*," which suffices for my argument.

35. *Heis theos en te theosi kai anthrópōisi megistos*. Of course, classicists quarrel about the correct interpretation of this "one" as joyfully as do Old Testament scholars about "Israel, your God is one" (on which, see Steve Geller in this volume). Do the two lines contain *three* predicates ('one', 'greatest', 'not resembling') or only two, with 'one' functioning as attribute? And so on and so forth. See the discussions in Stokes 1971, pp. 76–79, and Lesher 1992, pp. 96–100. It is often attempted to 'dis-monotheize' the expression *heis theos* by pointing out that a common Greek idiom uses *heis* to reinforce the superlative (which is true) and next arguing that what is intended is: "the one greatest god," thus ruling out: "God is one, the greatest..." (which is mistaken). To demonstrate the faultiness of this argument would require too much space. I confine myself to the observations, first, that the complete doxography, including Aristotle and Theophrastus, understands these lines and the rest of Xenophanes' theology as unequivocally implying "God is one" and, second, that the all-embracing predicates in the several fragments quoted can only refer to a divine being that is not only infinitely *greater* than, but also and more important, *fundamentally different* from (supposed) other divine beings. I myself have tried to avoid an all too explicit interpretation by not inserting the verbal form "is," which does not occur in the Greek text.

36. Aristotle, *Met.* A 5.986b21, calls Xenophanes the first "monist" (*ho prōtos henisas*) because "he said that the One was the god (*to hen* [a neuter] *eimai ton theon*) after having looked up at the whole universe."

looming in the presentation by Anaximenes, between the postulate of one all-embracing divine *arche* and the acceptance of a polytheistic world view, as apparent in the reference to '(the) gods'? Nor is this the only place where Xenophanes refers to the plural 'gods'.³⁷ Or should we perhaps step back and first ask some preliminary questions? For instance, is our fragment proof of a monotheistic experiment, as is assumed by those scholars who praise Xenophanes as "the only genuine monotheist that ever existed,"³⁸ while claiming that "we cannot admit that Xenophanes conceded to the existence of subordinate or special gods; because it is exactly the existence of these gods that he had particularly in mind to deny"?³⁹ Or should we, on the contrary, doubt with many others "whether a convinced monotheist in an unreceptive polytheistic society would cloud the issue by a mention of plural gods that is at least ambiguous, in the very context where he is firmly stating his revolutionary view," inferring that "the fragment is not easy to reconcile with a pure monotheism"?⁴⁰ Since this question—more especially the notion of 'pure monotheism'—is essential to my central argument, as well as having a bearing on the whole issue of the present volume, we will cast a quick glance at the scholarly discussion.⁴¹ It will

37. They are found in Fragments 1.24; 11.1; 12.1; 14.1; 15.3; 16.1; 18.1; and 34.2.

38. U. von Wilamowitz, *Die griechische Literatur und Sprache* (Berlin, 1905), p. 38.

39. Burnet 1930, p. 143.

40. Stokes 1971, p. 76. Some go much further in their doubt. Babut 1974 contests the common opinion that Xenophanes' theological views constitute a radical departure from the religious mythologies of Homer and Hesiod. Cf. idem, *La religion des philosophes grecs* (Paris, 1974), pp. 22–27. In the same year and in a similar vein: Eisenstadt 1974. Cf. Heitsch 1994, p. 15: "Der Fehler, den Xenophanes zu sehen meint, liegt daher nicht darin, dass die einen oder anderen Völker falsche Vorstellungen von den Göttern haben, sondern darin dass sie sich überhaupt Bilder machen."

41. There are several discussions and bibliographical surveys. Apart from the ones mentioned above n. 32, most recent (but not most informative): A. Lefka, "The Xenophanean Religious Thought: A Field of Various Interpretations," *Kernos*, 2 (1989), pp. 89–96.

reveal how desperately—and diversely—scholars have struggled to elicit a coherent meaning from these two lines, squirming in their attempts to defend the text against the most fatal charge imaginable in Academia: lack of consistency.

One or Many?

By way of introduction I select three different assessments taken from three of the best-known textbooks.⁴² Burkert, in a characteristically clear and well-considered summary, writes: "What sounds like monotheism is nevertheless drawing on entirely customary formulae: one is the greatest and for that very reason is not alone." On the other hand, Kirk, Raven and Schofield comment: "'Greatest among gods and men' should not be taken literally; men are mentioned by a 'polar' usage. This is simply an emphatic device,"⁴³ and for the same reason the plural of 'gods' need not be intended literally."⁴⁴ Even so, they continue: "In fact Xenophanes wrote of 'gods' in other places also; partly, no doubt, this was a concession, perhaps not a fully conscious one, to popular religious terminology." Finally, Jaeger states: "But while he extols this God as more than human, he also describes him explicitly as 'the greatest among gods and men'. This manner of speaking, with its polar juxtaposition of gods and men, follows the old epic formulas; nevertheless it still makes it perfectly clear that besides the One God there must be others, just as there are men." However, according to Jaeger,

42. Burkert 1985, p. 308, KRS 170, and Jaeger 1947, pp. 43–44, respectively.

43. Indeed, Greek poetry abounds in polar expressions meant to denote a totality, not seldom producing curiously absurd results. KRS mention, for instance, Heraclitus Fr. 30, who says that the world-order was made by "none of gods or men." Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone* says: "Go, go now, servants, those present and those absent." G. Müller, *Sophokles Antigone* [Heidelberg 1967], comm. *ad loc.* explains the "Unlogik" by Creon's desperate haste. However, there are numerous parallels to these illogical polarities. See Eur. *Heracles* 1106, with von Wilamowitz' note; Eur. *Hippolytus*, with Barrett's note; Soph. *El.* 305; Plaut. *Trin.* 360.

44. In the same line, Guthrie 1962, p. 375, regrets the contradiction as "at the least a surprising carelessness."

these other gods could not be the anthropomorphic Homeric ones, and it was *not* Xenophanes' intention to compromise with popular religion.⁴⁵ Rather we should think of Thales' dictum "that all things are full of gods." Conclusion: "In any case the one all-embracing God is so far superior to all the other lesser divine forces that he alone could really seem important to Xenophanes." In our terminology, Jaeger seems to opt for a henotheistic solution.

How very revealing are these desperate attempts to come to terms with an undeniable and irritating clash of One and Many in two coherent lines of a professed 'monist'! After the well-nigh arithmetical inference that the superlative qualification 'the greatest' necessarily presupposes the existence of other (lesser) gods, we see two diametrically opposed strategies to negotiate the blatant contradiction that thus emerges: a centrifugal versus a centripetal one. The first⁴⁶ tries to get rid of the inconsistency by explaining it away: the mention of gods is nothing more than a rhetorical concession, not referring to anything 'really real'. At most it is a tactical concession to popular religious tradition, to which, by implication, in his heart Xenophanes must have vehemently opposed. The other approach offers an explanation in terms of what the Germans call so nicely *Hineininterpretation*, whence referred to as centripetal by me. It helpfully trots out a homemade theological system in order to make it all logically acceptable: there are indeed more gods but they cannot have been the traditional Olympians. The one great deity and the other lesser gods form a kind of hierarchy, in which the normal (or not so normal) lesser gods are for instance described as emanations or parts of the central 'one'.⁴⁷

45. Here he is followed by Nilsson *GGR* 13, p. 742: "nicht die Götter der Volksreligion."

46. Last refuge to many a scholar, including such celebrities as Zeller, Burnet, Diels-Kranz, followed by François 1957, p. 167, where one can find the literature.

47. For a survey of adherents to this idea including Gomperz, Decharme, Diès, Jaeger, and Untersteiner, see François 1957, p. 166.

This is not to say that this supposed 'unity in diversity'⁴⁸ was never conceived of in antiquity, for it was, notably in Stoic and Neoplatonic systems.⁴⁹ A famous case in point is the *theologia tripertita* as it was devised much later by the Roman polymath Varro.⁵⁰ In accordance with the Stoic doctrine, Varro claimed that all the gods were parts (*partes*) or qualities (*virtutes*) of one central superior divine being, which he identifies with Jupiter.⁵¹ However, any attempt to draw analogies

48. The idea that one principle (or one god) is all did not immediately find much adherence and in the earlier period—as far as we can see—remained confined to Orphic and Eleatic circles. I cannot go into the monist *par excellence* Parmenides and the relationship between his and Xenophanes' theories. See for later 'monism' with emphasis on Plato: Rowe 1980, pp. 54–67, and most recently: P. Curd, *The Legacy of Parmenides: Eleatic Monism and Later Presocratic Thought* (Princeton, 1998).

49. "The Stoics say that there is only one god, one and the same power, which is called by different names in accordance with different functions" (Servius *ad Verg. Georg.* 1.5). Grant 1986, pp. 75–83, gives a rapid survey in the context of and as opposed to early Christian theology.

50. He distinguished three types of theology: the one transmitted by poets (*mythicon*, translated by Augustinus as *fabulosa*), the one taught by philosophy (*physicon*, latin: *naturale*), and the *theologia civilis* (transposed to the Greek situation: the religion of the polis). Fr. 10: *prima ... theologia maxime accommodata est ad theatrum, secunda ad mundum, tertia ad urbem*. The latter one, being the religion of cult and ritual, should have aspects of both others in order to suit the taste and intellectual level of the *vulgus*. B. Cardauns, *M. Terentius Varro, Antiquitates Rerum Divinarum I. Die Fragmente* (Abh. Ak. Mainz, 1976), Fr. 6–12, esp. 7 = Aug. *CD* 6.5, and the commentary at pp. 140ff. See: G. Lieberg, "The Theologia Tripertita as an Intellectual Model in Antiquity," *JIES Monographs*, 4 (1984), pp. 91–115; *id.*, "Die Theologia Tripertita in Forschung und Bezeugung," *ANRW*, I.4 (1973), pp. 63–115; H. Dörrie, "Zu Varros Konzeption der theologia tripertita in den Antiquitates rerum divinarum," in *Festschrift G. Radke* (Münster, 1986), pp. 76–82. Cf. long before Varro, Aristotle *Met.* 1074b3, arguing that the divine encompasses the whole of nature (cf. *Mund.* 397b10–401b24, *Pol.* 1326a32, where god is the 'divine power' 9 [*thcia dunamis*] that 'holds everything together' as the informing principle of the kosmos, or Fr. 49, where he identifies god with mind), while "the rest is addition in the form of myth, in order to persuade the multitude and to be useful for laws and (private) interest."

51. Fr. 27 = August. *CD* 4.11, *omnes dii deaque sit unus Iuppiter, sive sint, ut quidam volunt, omnia ista partes eius sive virtutes eius*. Cf. the famous Hymn to Zeus by the Stoic Cleanthes. Most recent translation and discussion by W. Cassidy, in: M. Kiley *et alii* (eds.), *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine: A Critical Anthology* (London 1997), pp.

between Xenophanes and Varro is asking for trouble. First, Varro lived in the first century BCE, separated from Xenophanes by five centuries of increasingly sophisticated philosophical reflection. Secondly, while we do have the explicit theories of Varro at our disposal, there is no scrap of information on a supposed deeper coherence of the different types of gods in the few fragments of Xenophanes. On the contrary, the expression “greatest among gods *and men*” does little to encourage the reader to single out one of the two categories (the ‘gods’) for a special relationship to the One.

And there is yet another, more interesting, problem. On the basis of the same material and following the same kind of argumentation, exactly the opposite position can be defended. More than a century ago, Freudenthal⁵² claimed that he could find nothing whatsoever that is indicative of monotheistic tendencies in Xenophanes. According to him Xenophanes professed a genuine polytheism, albeit one in which one central god—whom Freudenthal identifies as Jupiter—reigns as a despot over his subject gods. As parts of the great God they reign over their own smaller sections of the world.⁵³

We observe a common trait in these different suggestions, namely the retroprojection of a typical modern drive towards consistency upon an archaic mentality that need not have had a similar penchant for (our) logic. This does not mean that all these suggestions are mistaken. It is

132–38. On Zeus as the ‘one god’ of Stoicism: A.A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (London 1974), p. 149f. For a documentation of the ‘one and all’ theology of late antiquity, see *TER UNUS*, pp. 213–16.

52. Freudenthal 1886, esp. pp. 8–12; 16; and 28–31. Of course, he met with fierce resistance by renowned contemporaries such as Zeller and Diels, who in their textbooks had proclaimed a ‘pure monotheism’ and felt no inclination to surrender. All the same, he found many followers as well. See: François 1957, p. 165, n. 1.

53. For that matter, the idea of an omnipotent Being, transcending all the other powers in the world, even the gods themselves, was one that the epic writers had already associated with *their* highest god. Hom. *Il.* 8, 18–27, presents a striking instance of the absolute superiority of Zeus, which even Aristotle *De motu an.* 4.700a cites as the first intimation of the power of his ‘unmoved mover’. See: Jaeger 1947, p. 46.

of course true that traditional expressions may persevere in an otherwise revolutionary new context. A popular proverbial expression from modern (allegedly *monotheistic*) Greece bears a curious resemblance to the Xenophanean paradox: “May God fit thee to find favour with gods and men.”⁵⁴ However, that Xenophanes may have been more deeply aware of the implied paradoxes in his system than the average user of a proverb would be, can perhaps be deduced from his words (Fr. 34):

No man knows, or ever will know, the truth about the gods and about everything I speak of: for even if one chanced to say the complete truth, yet oneself knows it not; but seeming (or: opinion) is allotted to all.

How very intricate the “truth about the gods” is, appears from a few lines from his famous Banquet elegy, where (lines 13ff.) he gives the seemingly monotheistic advice:

The first thing men of sense should do is to sing a hymn to *the God* with reverent words and pure speech, with a libation and a prayer for the means to do what is right.

However, only ten lines later, plurality strikes back in the final line (24), where we read:

Nay, always keep *the gods* duly in mind.

One and Many

So we have returned again to the incontestably correct observation that: “the fragments warrant attributing to Xenophanes the novel idea of a single god of unusual power, consciousness, and cosmic influence, but not the stronger view that beyond this one god there could be nothing else worthy of the name.”⁵⁵ How must we imagine that

54. J. C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 1910), p. 48, who aptly comments that it “combines impartially the one God and the many.”

55. Lesher 1992, p. 99.

Xenophanes coped with the paradox? *Did* he? Did he *experience* it as a paradox? We have seen that some scholars claim that Xenophanes must have been a monotheist (he said so himself, didn't he?), others that he cannot but have been a polytheist (he said so himself, right?). In order to 'solve' the paradox one scholar makes an appeal to phenomena of linguistic-rhetorical perseverance, another devises a theology in which gods are part of *the* god.⁵⁶ *Nobody*, as far as I know, has ever suggested that Xenophanes just adhered to *both* views (he said so himself, okay?), *because he literally had no choice*.⁵⁷ Before we explore this (inconsistent) suggestion a bit further, I should first say what I do *not* wish to imply by this idea. I am not thinking of a conscious yielding to political or social pressure, whether or not compensated by an occasional 'eppure *si muove*' between the teeth. Nor do I appeal to an unconscious slip of the pen or even—though there is nothing wrong with it—to a gradual development in the philosopher's thought of which we have only incoherent and undatable scraps of evidence. What I do wish to suggest can be explained in three related, but distinct arguments.

56. "Diese verwirrende Fülle sich widersprechender Xenophanesbilder": P. Sternmetz, "Xenophanes-studien," *RhM*, 109 (1966), pp. 13–73, esp. 24. I of course do not mean that such representations are impossible or non-existent. Many non-Western cultures do know similar forms of 'inclusive monotheism' and 'pluriform monotheism', as Th. P. van Baaren, "Pluriform Monotheism," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 20 (1965–66), pp. 321–27, coined it.

57. Although Pötscher 1962 comes quite close. His discussion and refutation of all other interpretations mentioned in my text is the most cogent known to me. Also parts of his interpretation of the relationship 'One god' – 'the gods', that I shall cite shortly, are convincing, but I do not follow him in his central thesis that 'the gods' are representatives of 'the One god': "Durch die Wesensgleichheit des einen Gottes und der Götter—wenn man von der Einheit des überragenden absieht—vermögen ihn diese zu repräsentieren": "Der eine Gott ist in ihnen allen präsent, weil sie—die Erscheinungsformen von ihm in der bewussten Welt—ihm in allem gleich sind, aber er ist doch mehr als die Summe der Götter: denn er ist der Eine." Cf. also Gerson *l.c.* next note. O. Gigon, "Die Theologie der Vorsokratiker," in: Rose 1954, pp. 127–55; *ibid.*, pp. 33–36, asks just the right questions on these types of contradictions ("Widerspruch") and argues that some of them are unresolvable and should be taken seriously ("unaufhebbar und anzuerkennen," p. 35).

First, Xenophanes, besides being a genius, was and remained a child of his time and, like most other social beings, was unable to escape from his cultural universe, even if he had wished to. While *experimenting* with one he was *living* with a second, different set of images and representations of the divine. The two indeed diverged dramatically and, if subjected to a severe formal logical analysis, would inevitably have come to a clash. The significant point—ininitely more interesting and important than the unresolvable and indeed mistaken question of which of the two aspects represented his *real* conviction⁵⁸—is that they were *not* scrutinized in such a relentless manner.⁵⁹ Apparently,

58. In this respect there are excellent observations in Gerson 1990, pp. 18–19, who aptly notes that there may easily be some confusion in using the terms 'monotheistic' and 'polytheistic' as contradictory and as suitable for classifying the thought of Xenophanes: "If by 'polytheism' we mean the recognition of a multiplicity of active powers in the universe stronger and more durable than men, then Xenophanes is a polytheist. ... If 'polytheism' indicates belief in a multiplicity of *personal* beings more powerful and durable than men, I think the textual evidence is against the claim that Xenophanes is a polytheist.... When I say that Xenophanes is a philosophical monotheist, I do not mean to deny that he is a polytheist in the first sense or that, conceivably, he is a polytheist in the second sense, but that he reasons to a unique *arche* in the universe...." The (essential) difference between Gerson's views and mine is that I would *not* deny that the two conceptions—monotheism–polytheism—are logically contradictory and mutually exclusive, if considered from one and the same perspective. Nor would I deny the possibility of the second option concerning polytheism, though avoiding the term 'belief'. As I shall argue, in Xenophanes' perception they exist simultaneously and side by side as *complementary* forms of expression.

59. It requires lots of courage in our often rigidly constructivistic late modern climate to reconsider whether there may still be a spark of truth in the discovery of the first part of this century, for instance in the works of Hermann Fränkel, Bruno Snell, and in a different way in Walter Pötscher, that archaic Greeks did not (always) draw similar nor as harsh distinctions as twentieth-century readers, for instance between bodily and psychic phenomena. In her own brilliant way, Ruth Padel, *In and Out of the Mind: Greek Images of the Tragic Self* (Princeton, 1992) exposes that nerve. If we want to make sense of Greek religion, following the lines set out by Gould 1985, we should *not* overlook the motto that he adopted from William Empson: "The notion is that life involves maintaining oneself between contradictions that cannot be solved." Nor is it always helpful, as anthropologists remind us, to ask non-Western (including early Greek) people direct questions, "because it places them in a realistic

both conceptions could and did exist side by side, not only within the cultural universe of one civilization or in one period of time, which is a historical banality, *but even in the mind of one poet and thinker*,⁶⁰ which may be of great explanatory relevance. In other words, Xenophanes devised a radically new conception of god, yet did not even contemplate taking an equally radical leave from the cultic—and, I would not hesitate to assume, partly also from the mythical⁶¹—conception of the (traditional) gods, who had always been and continued to be indispensable and essential materials for the construction of the symbolic universe of the *polis*. Whenever—if ever—it was necessary to keep them apart, the author had recourse to several different layers of discourse—philosophical, mythical, cultic—which constantly alternate and intertwine in his texts.

In general, the two different imageries may be prevented from clashing by a virtuoso winking process, well known from (socio-) psychological reactions to cognitive dissonance.⁶² In a recent mono-

frame of mind. They are forced to analyze, define and distinguish with a critical mind what is essentially vague, undefinable and largely emotional": J. F. Holleman, *Acommodating the Spirit Amongst Some North-Eastern Shona Tribes* (London, 1953), p. 35f.

60. Indeed, it would do no harm to recall that Xenophanes is "the only one whose genuine writings find a place both among the Presocratic philosophers of Diels and the lyric anthology of Diehl": Guthrie 1962, p. 361.

61. In this respect I agree with Eisenstadt 1974 and Babut 1974, who, however, certainly goes too far in downplaying the uniqueness and singularity of the new God.

62. I have amply discussed these psychological techniques introduced by I. Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (New York, 1957), in the Introduction to *TER UNUS*, pp. 4–8, where more relevant titles can be found, and applied them throughout that book. I also discussed the question whether the notion of cognitive dissonance may be applied as long as the conflicting elements are not brought to the attention of the observer. It may, but whoever does not like this answer may prefer the image of "a winking process" applied to keep two conflicting realities apart exactly in order to *prevent* them from clashing on the level of conscious awareness. Then the dissonances are "situated just below the normal level of critical consciousness in men [...] so that they could in principle have been aware of it but as a rule took it for granted," thus J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York, 1971), p. 32. Another question is whether

graph on Erasmus, another genius on the borderline between two paradigms, the stark inconsistencies and ambiguities in his thought and expression are explained by the fact that he belonged to two cultures: the late medieval world that he could not forsake, and the early modern one that he helped to create.⁶³ And so did Xenophanes.⁶⁴ In his thought-provoking excursus on the 'logische Frage' implied in the contradictions of the One and the Many, Hornung,⁶⁵ after denouncing a long list of traditional explanations marked by such predicates as 'alogic', 'prelogic', or 'undifferentiated', embraces the concept of complementarity. Two—logically—contradictory predicates or qualities can both be experienced as true and valid. He adduces Bohr's theory

the theory may be applied at all to pre-modern—even ancient—mentality. This question was answered affirmatively and convincingly in a recent article by N. H. Taylor, "Cognitive Dissonance and Early Christianity: A Theory and its Application Reconsidered," *Religion and Theology: A Journal of Contemporary Religious Discourse*, 5 (1998), pp. 138–53.

63. J. D. Tracy, *Erasmus of the Low Countries* (Berkeley, 1997). Circa 1600 CE revolutionary astronomical discoveries were gradually incorporated into a traditional cosmology, effecting incredible contradictions: T. van Nouhuys, *The Age of Two-Faced Janus: The Comets of 1577 and 1618 and the Decline of the Aristotelian World View in the Netherlands* (Diss. Leiden, 1997). For antiquity I have argued the same concerning the paradox of liberation and subjection in the early Hellenistic period as a signal of cultural and political transition: "There are indispensable relics of the old which still exists and inevitable signs of the new which already exists, irreconciled and pregnant with tension": *TER UNUS*, pp. 39–95, esp. 82–83. For Israel, cf. for instance: N. Lohfink, "Polytheistisches und monotheistisches Sprechen über Gott im Alten Testament," in: *idem, Unsere grossen Väter: Das Alte Testament zu Themen dieser Jahre* (Freiburg etc., 1977), pp. 124–44, esp. 139: "Es herrscht also eine Dialektik von Vielheit und Einheit": p. 141: "Es kam darauf an, Polytheismus wie Monotheismus ... als zwei in gewisser Hinsicht gleichwertige, jedoch epochal festgelegte Weisen des Sprechens über Gott deutlich werden zu lassen."

64. No less a person than Karl Popper has often lauded Xenophanes as a forerunner of his own—very (late) modern—philosophy, and thus becomes easy prey for Feyerabend's scorn (see below, p. 109).

65. Hornung 1971, pp. 233–40. For what follows he refers to C. F. von Weizsäcker, "Komplementarität und Logik," *Die Naturwissenschaften*, 42 (1955), pp. 521–29; A. Petersen, *Quantumphysics and the Philosophical Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968).

of the complementary validity of both the wave- and the quantum theory as a revealing analogy.

The same physicist provides a very appropriate overture to our second consideration of the apparent inconsistency of Xenophanes' divine world. In the period in which Bohr was involved in the paradoxes implied in the quantum-theory, he commented thus upon the dirty water and grubby towels with which he was kindly invited to clean the dishes in a temporary primitive lodging:

Mit dem Geschirwaschen ist es doch genau wie mit unserem Sprache. Wir habe schmutziges Spülwasser und schmutzige Küchentücher, und doch gelingt es, damit Teller und Gläser schliesslich sauberzumachen. So habe wir in der Sprache unklare Begriffe und eine in ihrem Anwendungsbereich in unbekannter Weise eingeschränkte Logik, und doch gelingt es, damit Klarheit in unser Verständnis der Natur zu bringen.⁶⁶

My second argument, then, is that Xenophanes did not always need to "keep apart" his two types of gods. They *were* apart. The new god represents a radically new and different category. Though conceived of as the *immanent* principle of all that is, he or it at the same time *transcends* all that is: gods and men.⁶⁷ In later times a human being who exceeded all other mortals in power or quality—such as Hellenistic kings or Roman emperors—could be promoted into a category different from the human species. Transcending the '*condition humaine*', he became god. As long as he was god—for instance during restricted periods in which his divinity was ritually staged or politically deployed—the display of human frailties was frowned upon: no sneezing for the deified emperor during his *adventus*. However, though parading as a god

66. As related by W. Heisenberg, *Der Teil und das Ganze* (Munich, 1973), pp. 150–67, quoted by E. Heitsch, "Xenophanes und die Anfänge des kritischen Denkens," *Abh. Ak. Mainz* (1994), p. 4. I cannot vouch for the aptness of the comparison.

67. Gerson 1990, p. 242, n. 18, is right when he calls it misleading in the Pre-Socratic context to use the contrast between immanence and transcendence to describe the early understanding of an *arche*.

and being honored with the same "hymns, reverent words and libation," to quote Xenophanes, and even with sacrifices, he was *not* a god like the other 'real' gods.⁶⁸ The few megalomaniacs who did fail to observe the boundaries were considered insane. All this (and much more) indicates that there was no such thing as one fixed category 'god'.⁶⁹ Rather we are confronted with a type of classification without sharp borders, more especially with a so-called 'polythetic class', a concept first coined by Wittgenstein. Such classes are like families to which all members belong, linked by "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing" without, however, sharing all the family resemblances.⁷⁰

A process of deification comparable to that of the Hellenistic ruler happened to Xenophanes' First Principle of Being, departing however from the other extreme on the scale of divinity. Exceeding all imagination, the First Principle inevitably was endowed with the highest and uniquely unsurpassable predicate available in the Greek language. 'It' became god *faute de mieux*.⁷¹ However, though bearing the same name

68. Significantly, people as a rule did not pray to the divine ruler, although, as always, there are a few exceptions.

69. The book from which I had hoped to learn about the specific nature of Greek divinity, namely A. B. Lloyd, *What is a God? Studies in the Nature of Greek Divinity* (London, 1997), falls short of expectations.

70. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York, 1958, translated from the German ed. of 1953) I, pp. 66–67. The principle of polythetic classification is exemplarily exploited by J. Z. Smith, "Fences and Neighbors: Some Contours of Early Judaism," in: *idem*, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago, 1982), pp. 1–18. It is also usefully applied to the definition of 'religion': W. P. Alston, "Religion," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, VII (1967), p. 142, distinguishes 'nine religion-making characteristics' and states that "when enough of these characteristics are present to a sufficient degree, we have religion." The same might work out for gods, but, of course, Alston's statements contain at least three subjective elements liable to arbitrariness. Hence the concept of polythetic class has also been questioned: R. Needham, "Polythetic Classification: Convergence and Consequences," *Mam*, 10 (1975), pp. 349–69.

71. As Gerson 1990, p. 246, n. 40, scornfully remarks about one modern interpretation of the *apeiron* of Anaximander. Cf. Burkert 1996, p. 27, "Language itself, as a signifying system, seems to be in need of an 'ultimate signifier', the absolute, god."

and sharing a number of qualities with the traditional gods, 'he' differs from them in other respects. Nothing gives better expression to the profound difference than the concept 'transcendence'. Though belonging to the same polythetic class as (traditional) gods, the One God at the same time transcends all others, hence belongs to a different category. His ontological (and grammatical) 'singularity' entails a qualitative singularity.⁷² This implies that the One and the Many did not need to *compete*. As concepts they were complementary. Both possessed a conceptual domain of their own besides sharing the territory common to gods. There was no real urge, either in the field of society or in that of logic, to expel either one of them from the religious retina.

In sum, language can be desperately slippery. A god need not *always* be god, some gods are *not complete* gods, some gods are *supercomplete* gods, hence some gods are more god than others, etcetera. The following quotation may help us recover from these startling observations:⁷³

Indeed, the reader's attitude seems generally to be determined by two equally irrational assumptions, namely 1) that the human mind is capable of and prepared to constantly produce consistent thought-sequences; and 2) that language is the perfect means of communication for expressing these thoughts adequately and unambiguously to others. As for the latter assumption, even the briefest glance at the linguistic literature teaches us that human language is an extremely precarious means of communication. "Their fight, our

72. This would be my answer to a question posed by F. Chapouthier in: Rose 1954, p. 162: "Comment les philosophes ont-ils laissé subsister côte à côte d'une part le nom de dieu pour désigner les principes de la nature et quelquefois un principe unique et de l'autre ce même nom pour désigner les dieux de la religion traditionnelle?" (And see the subsequent discussion there). Pötscher 1962, p. 5, seems to be the only one who has understood this: "um die Götter hat man sich zu kümmern wie um eine reale Gegebenheit ... Doch der eine Gott hat eine höhere Realität indem er der grösste ist, sich aber nicht bloss graduell von den Göttern unterscheidet, sondern durch seine Singularität (*heis theos*) in einem prinzipiellen Gegensatz zu der pluralistischen Gattung der *theoi* steht." However, my final interpretation of their interrelationship differs fundamentally from his, as cited above n. 57.

73. It is borrowed from *TER UNUS*, pp. 14–16, q.v. the bibliographical references.

fight," cheered a Red radical Dutch chief inspector during a protest march against the judicial treatment of members of the German *Rote Armee Fraktion* more than two decades ago. Alarmed patriots detected a call for armed terrorism, the natural meaning implicit in 'their fight'. However, 'our fight', so the chief inspector replied, could not possibly contain this meaning since he himself was a pacifist and opposed to any use of firearms. So 'fight' was not 'fight', after all, a surprising lesson which did not prevent him from taking advantage of the opportunity to retire early soon after. Here, non-linguists discovered 'live' what any introduction in polysemy could have taught them,⁷⁴ namely, that one term can unite quite incompatible, sometimes even radically opposite implications, references and meanings, depending on the user, the situation and the associations they bear.⁷⁵

Revealing illustrations abound, particularly in the (ab)use made by political language of terms such as 'democracy', as documented by a wealth of studies on political vocabulary. Perhaps the most maltreated term in this area of ambiguities is 'freedom', with its dark opposite 'tyranny' as second best. But 'meaning' is not so unambiguous either. After all, Ogden and Richards listed 23 meanings of 'meaning' in 1923.⁷⁶ "Hence comes the great trouble we have in understanding each other, and the fact that we even lie to each other

74. Of course, other lessons could be drawn from recent history. The first line of the German national anthem, "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles," contains a relational polysemy similar to 'fight' in our example. It can be taken in an imperialistic sense (as many Germans and all their enemies understood it during the last World War) or as an expression of personal devotion: "Germany is the one and only for me." See W. Dieckmann, *Information oder Überredung: Zum Wortgebrauch der politischen Werbung in Deutschland seit der Französischen Revolution* (Marburg, 1964), p. 157.

75. A splendid example from the world of children: around 1950 one of the questions in the entrance examination for Dutch secondary schools ran, "What is a hero?" Some 40% of the young candidates answered 'a coward, a weakling'. I well remember from my own youth that this was the primary—to many, even the only—meaning of that word, which had its origin in the derisive use of the word for the enemies on the next street. I also happen to *know* why the 'real' meaning was not completely eradicated from my mind at the time: the existence of a series of much desired stamps featuring the portraits of naval heroes.

76. C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (London, 1923; 1946⁸).

without wishing to: *it is because we all use the same words without giving them the same meaning.*" Durkheim already sighed in 1912⁷⁷—and he was not even a linguist.

I add briefly a third consideration, which is both a specification and a generalization of the argument just put forward. There is no need for a detailed discussion, because it concerns a truism, but sometimes it is helpful to recall that truisms may contain a truth. The argument is independent of the specific nature of the very special god of Xenophanes and fits in with the 'chaos'-theory mentioned in the beginning of the present paper. The imagery and, indeed, the 'personality' of a god in a cultic ambience, be it in private worship or in temple ritual, is not necessarily identical to and is often very different from that of the same god in theological or mythical reflection. The great debate between Vernant and Burkert has its origin partly in this distinction. It is perfectly possible, and even belongs to normal practice, to perform a cultic ritual without ever relating it to the theological identity of the god involved. Dutch ministers daintily succeed in ritually reciting the apostolic creed that portrays a god whom, to judge by their sermons, the same preachers have long lost sight of. For this same reason the many gods of civil religion did not collide with the One created by Xenophanes, even in the philosopher's own perception.

And different they were! The profound innovation in the concept of the Xenophanean god becomes apparent precisely in the phrases quoted from the Banquet elegy: "The first thing men of sense should do is to sing a hymn to the God with reverent words and pure speech, with a libation and a prayer for the means to do what is right." Insofar as the new god should be honored with hymns, reverent words, pure

77. E. Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (Paris, 1912). I quote from the English translation: *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London, 19762), p. 436, adding my italics. Here is how a linguist phrases the problem: T. F. Carney, *Content Analysis: A Technique for Systematic Inference from Communication* (London, 1972), p. 86: "Words ... do not have 'meanings' in the sort of way that children have parents. They have *uses*, identifiable in particular places and periods."

speech, and with libations, there is not much of a problem. Rough outlines of what these hymns may have looked like can be gathered from hymns referring to a 'one and all' ideology, ubiquitous in later times. Libations, as distinct from sacrifice (which is conspicuously lacking from the picture!), are in order too. They often function not so much as a gift to the god(s) but rather as the ritual overture to communication with the divine. However, as soon as prayer comes into view difficulties emerge. What should one pray for to a god of such an immense and abstract nature? The answer is as appropriate in the philosophical context as it is unserviceable in the religion of daily life. One should ask for "the means to do what is right." With this prescription a long history of 'philosophical prayer' begins. If it is true, in the words of Burkert,⁷⁸ that Xenophanes found listeners, but no adherents or disciples, and that his theories had no impact whatever on the mainstream cult religion, this can be explained above all by the fact that his god by its very nature was devoid of anything resembling anthropomorphic personality in terms of either representation (image, myth) or communication (cultic ritual, prayer). These four elements, it should be recalled, were the stuff ancient religion was made of. The god of Xenophanes, conversely, was 'ab-human'⁷⁹ according to the Sceptic Timon, and "ein Denk-, Seh-, Hör-, und Intelligenzmonstrum" in the opinion of Paul Feyerabend,⁸⁰ referring to the famous characterization in Fr. 24: "As whole he/it sees, as whole he/it comprehends, as whole he/it hears."⁸¹

78. Burkert 1985, p. 309.

79. My tentative translation of (funny) Greek *ap'anthrôpon* (Fabricius; miss *apanthrôpon*)—by analogy with 'abnormal', and in order to avoid the misleading term 'inhuman'—as Timon (*apud* Sext. Emp. *Hypoth.* 1.224 = Fr. A 35 D-K.) qualifies the Xenophanean god. On this passage: E. Vogt, "Des Timon von Phleius Urteil über Xenophanes," *RhM*, 107 (1964), pp. 295–98.

80. Feyerabend 1986, p. 210.

81. Except in cases of emphasis, Greek does not use pronouns to indicate the subject (no doubt to the relief of Xenophanes). Different translations betray (slightly)

Once more, ambiguity cannot be avoided. According to Jaeger, on the strength of exactly the same data, the One God is quite clearly a conscious, more or less personal being,⁸² while, on the other hand, Cornford⁸³—followed by many others—holds that, if ‘personal’ at all, the god is yet not a person in the full sense of that term, since in contrast to the traditional gods, there is no communication with him. Indeed, according to many a specialist, Xenophanes’ theology is better characterized by the concept pantheism⁸⁴ than by monotheism. Again I would suggest that it is mistaken, and consequently doomed to failure, to try and explain Xenophanes’ system in terms of an ‘either-or’ dilemma. Rather, and this time even more obviously, we are confronted with an exemplary instance of an ‘and-and’ complementarity. In its (original) quality of a physical *arche*, the First Principle is a neuter and as such ‘it’ can—albeit not very easily—be designated without the aid of anthropomorphic characteristics. As a *theos* (the second step in the evolution) ‘he’ cannot be.⁸⁵ Consequently, in the course of his reflection on the *arche*, the philosopher is both condemned to and saved by a constantly alternating appeal to two different focuses, the physical-

different interpretations. KRS: “All of him sees, all thinks, and all hears”; Leshar: “Whole he sees, whole he thinks, and whole he hears.”

82. Jaeger 1947, p. 44; cf. François 1957, p. 162: “un être personnel.”

83. F. M. Cornford, *Principium Sapientiae: The Origins of Greek Philosophical Thought* (Cambridge, 1952), p. 147f.

84. Or is no theology at all: D. Babut, *La religion des philosophes grecs* (Paris, 1974), p. 26: “Mais qu’il ne soit pas un philosophe comme les autres n’autorise pas à le transformer en théologien: c’est en philosophe qu’il essaie d’élaborer un concept satisfaisant du divin...” On pantheistic concepts of one god see: Rowe 1980. For bibliography see: C. Corbato, “Studi senofanei,” *Annali Triestini*, 22 (1952), pp. 179–227, esp. p. 180, nn. 6–9; M. Untersteiner, *Senofane* (Florence 1955), pp. ccff.

85. Cf. O. Gigon in: Rose 1954, p. 138, in connection with the *apeiron* of Anaximander: “Die gewaltsame Verknüpfung dinglicher und personaler Kategorien Es genügt zu sehen, wie seltsam ... ‘physikalische’ und ‘theologische’ Kategorien sich verbinden.” 35: “Der Widerspruch ist unaufhebbar und anzuerkennen.”

philosophical and the theological, each marked by its corresponding type of discourse. However, the two layers of perception do intermingle, as they have never stopped doing in theological reflection to the present day. Due to restrictions inherent in human imagination and language it is impossible to speak about a god, however devoid of human characteristics, without applying anthropomorphic terminology. Any philosopher of religion knows it: why demand from Xenophanes more than the humanly possible?

Concluding Remarks

One and Many, unity and diversity, it is all there in Xenophanes’ philosophy. However, the interaction between the two does not permit a rash and simple definition. If there is unity in diversity here, it is not the well-known concept of a plurality of gods united into, or being parts or emanations of, one all-encompassing supreme divine being. The *arche* devised by Xenophanes was the product of natural philosophy, not of theology. As *physical* ‘all’ it *did* encompass, but it encompassed everything that is, because it *was* everything that is: not only gods, but also men, and the whole material world. Just as men were both part of it *and* were completely independent beings, so were the (traditional) gods. As *theological* ‘One God’ (*Heis Theos*) he transcended everything, hence also the (other) gods, and in this perspective the gods maintained their traditional (pluralist) independent status. Instead of inclusiveness there is coexistence in accordance with the principle of complementarity.

In general terms, then, it would appear that a monotheistic theology is *not* ‘by definition’ rigorously incompatible with polytheistic forms of (cult-) religion. Though I have argued that Xenophanes’ monotheism was not *inclusive*, I would not object to the label *non-exclusivistic*.⁸⁶

86. I would be tempted to suggest for further use the term ‘sophisticated polytheism’, if its creator had not meant something radically different by it: W. G.

As to the nature of the (other) gods, I have argued against the suggestion that they formed a novel category different from the traditional (Homeric) gods. However, there is yet another possibility: *hoi theoi* of Xenophanes may be congruent with a traditional picture, though not with that of the traditional Olympian family as represented in myth and cult, but as a comprehensive expression indicating a more or less generic anonymous divine leading principle in nature.⁸⁷ Although it will soon become apparent that this possibility is not consonant with the religious evidence, the question is of interest for our issue, for indeed, in archaic and classical literature, the expression *hoi theoi* often refers to a general organizing principle ruling nature and cosmos. In our second section I will explore this second experiment in oneness, paradoxically often expressed in a plural.⁸⁸

II. MANY IS ONE: (THE) GODS, (THE) GOD, AND THE DIVINE

In addition to such proclamations that god is one and all, there exists a type of discourse in which the term god (and variants) seems to be used as a general device to explain—or at least express a sense of—the inexplicable, often connoting inescapable fate, chance or the predestined. Though expressions of this kind can be found from early archaic poetry into late antiquity, I have selected Herodotus' references to God, [the] God, [the] Gods, and the Divine to demonstrate the

Lambert, "The Historical Development of the Mesopotamian Pantheon: A Study in Sophisticated Polytheism," in: H. Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts (eds.), *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East* (Baltimore and London, 1975), pp. 191–99.

87. See for instance: François 1957, pp. 169–71, whose general argument I endorse, but whom I do not follow in the suggestion: "Le terme *theoi* n'exprime pas autre chose que la notion traditionnelle de la Puissance divine," referring to similar expressions in Pindar and Aeschylus.

88. The passages are often analyzed and compared for their common theme of the causes of human disaster. See for instance: N. Marinatos, "Wahl und Schicksal bei Herodot," *Saeculum*, 33 (1982), pp. 258–64; von Fritz 1967, p. 305, and many of the studies mentioned below nn. 97ff.

complicated intertwining of various layers of significance. I focus on the various expressions as presented in two famous *logoi* (episodes) of Herodotus' *Historiai*, first, the famous story of Polycrates' attempt to prevent his inescapable downfall in III.39–43, and next a pair of celebrated, interrelated passages concerning the life of Croesus: I.32–34, the story of Solon's lesson to Croesus, and I.86–91, the account and interpretation of Croesus' fall.

Herodotus on Fate

The stories deal with the basic Greek belief that excessive luck or wealth is inevitably followed by an (often sudden and unexpected) 'catastrophe', both in the literal Greek sense of 'reversal' and in the more customary negative meaning of 'ruin'. Both narratives introduce a 'tragic warner', whose task it is to express his concern about the imminent vicissitudes of the too-fortunate protagonist, and who may even offer suggestions for escaping the impending doom. In both stories the warner fails—indeed, in accordance with the central message, *must* fail.⁸⁹

In the first story, Polycrates,⁹⁰ a fabulously wealthy and powerful tyrant of Samos in the sixth century BCE, receives a warning from his friend Amasis, king of Egypt, that "the divine power is envious" (*to theion esti phthoneron*) and that, consequently, his excessive luck and good fortune will inevitably be succeeded by reversal and doom ("for I have never yet heard of a man who after an unbroken run of luck was

89. On the role of the warner in Herodotus: H. Bischoff, *Der Warner bei Herodot* (Marburg, 1932); R. Lattimore, "The Wise Adviser in Herodotus," *CPh*, 34 (1939), pp. 24–35.

90. The episode has drawn much attention and is much discussed. H. S. Versnel, "Polycrates and his Ring: Two Neglected Aspects," *Studi Storico-Religiosi*, 1 (1977), pp. 17–46, discusses earlier views and gives a new interpretation. Most recently: J. E. van der Veen, "The Lord of the Ring," *Mnemosyne*, 46 (1993), pp. 433–57, also in: *idem*, *The Significant and the Insignificant: Five Studies in Herodotus' View of History* (Amsterdam, 1996), pp. 6–22; D. Ogden, *The Crooked Kings of Ancient Greece* (London, 1997), pp. 119–23.

not finally brought to complete ruin") unless he succeeds in 'buying off' destiny by abandoning what he values most. A precious ring thrown into the sea so as to effectuate its irretrievable loss unfortunately does return to the fortunate tyrant in the stomach of a fish presented to him. Moral: "It is impossible for a man to save another man from his destiny." What will be, will be: the fortunate find is a foreboding of doom.

In the first part of the Croesus *logos*⁹¹ (I.32–34), the wise Athenian statesman Solon visits the wealthiest man of his time, Croesus, king of Lydia. In his rôle as tragic warner, the Athenian offers a disquisition on the whims of fortune. Nobody can be called happy before the end of his life, since every day may bring a turn in the present situation. Nobody can (or should) enjoy a complete set of 'happifiers'.⁹² A sound mixture of good and bad is preferable. "Look to the end, to the final outcome. Many humans the god, after first having granted them a glimpse of happiness, has brought to utter ruin." After Solon's departure, so the story continues, "Croesus was stricken by divine wrath (lit., "a great punishment from the god": *ek theou nemesis megalê*), presumably because he had deemed himself to be the happiest of men." This is, in this narrative, the first reference to *personal* guilt as an explanatory device. This time, divine or cosmic reaction is not provoked by the excessive success itself, but by human pride, which is censured and punished.

91. Again a much debated episode. No general enquiry on Herodotus' historical motives can get around it. See especially: O. Regenbogen, *Die Geschichte von Solon und Krösus, Das humanistische Gymnasium* 41 (1930) 1–20, (= Marg 1965, 375–403); M. Miller, *The Herodotean Croesus, Klio* 41 (1963) 58–94; W. Marg, 'Selbstsicherheit' bei Herodot., in: Marg 1965, 290–301; von Fritz 1967, 217–23; H.-P. Stahl, Learning through Suffering? *YCLS* 24 (1975) 1–36; C. Chiasson, The Herodotean Solon, *GRBS* 17 (1986) 249–62.

92. The idea remains popular throughout antiquity. When Plutarchus *De Superst.* 167f. (first century CE) discusses "human experiences and actions which are linked with chance circumstances which move now in one course and now in another," he opens the passage with the *gnome* (proverbial expression) *koimon anthrôpon to mê panta dieutuchein* ("it is the common lot of mankind not to enjoy continual good fortune in every respect").

The second passage of the Croesus *logos* (I.86–91) pictures the Lydian king utterly degraded as captive and slave of the conqueror of his empire, the Persian king Cyrus. Reflecting on the possible causes of his downfall, he first blames "the god of the Greeks [Apollo, whom he had honored more than any other god with gifts and who, he thought, had treacherously promised him a victory], being the one who encouraged me to fight you," and next, without any transition, "the will of the gods."⁹³ Apollo counters the reproach, arguing that "destiny is inescapable even for a god." It is the Moirai (goddesses of Fate) who had determined that Croesus had to pay for the crime committed by one of his forbears—and it was only because Apollo had interceded for Croesus that the Moirai had delayed that punishment for three years. Moreover, the god had saved Croesus from death by fire. Finally, it was not the god's fault that Croesus had misunderstood the oracles. And so Croesus gained insight into the real cause of his downfall and "acknowledged that the god was innocent and the fault all his own."

Space does not permit a more detailed discussion of the complete variety of explanations of inescapable doom scattered through the passages under discussion. Instead, I will now quickly summarize the various explanatory strategies that are employed, including some not mentioned so far. (Note that my comments here imply no genetic or evolutionary sequence):

1. *Impersonal, universal and irreducible laws or principles, not (necessarily or explicitly) connected with the existence or intervention of gods or a god:*
 - A) *Unpredictable and erratic*
 - I.1 Predestination, fate, what is destined to happen (*peprômenê moira*), also represented as the working of the Moirai.

93. Note that this is the only instance of the plural *daimones* in Herodotus' work. I cannot go into the intricate question concerning the 'exact' meaning of *daimon*, and its possible differences from *theos*. In the passages cited in our text, there is practically no difference between the two.

- I.2 Man as the plaything of arbitrary chance (*sumphorê*).
- B) *More or less predictable*
- I.3 The universal law of alternation (*kuklos*).
- I.4 A special subtheme of I.3: the extremely lucky or rich will inescapably be brought to ruin.
- II. *The (arbitrary) intervention of the divine:*
 - II.1 The purposeful and deliberate intervention of one personal god.
 - II.2 "The will of the gods" (*theoi, daimones*) as a general, determining principle.
- III. *The 'envy of the gods' (phthonos tôn theôn):*
A union of I.4 (automatic/predictable) and II.2 (divine/reactive) into one (divine) principle.
- IV. *Human fault resulting in:*
 - IV.1 Punishment for an error of the victim himself.
 - IV.2 Substitutive retribution for an offence of another, especially of an ancestor.

Admittedly this is a rigid scheme. In the first place it is based in part on *terminological* distinctions and consequently presents distinctions that may seem self-evident to the outsider (*in casu* the modern reader), but which do not necessarily reflect conceptual distinctions that would have been recognized by (the) Greeks themselves. Moreover, the scheme runs the risk of separating terms and/or ideas that in their various contexts may function as variant instruments to express the same notion. So, I do not claim that Herodotus and his contemporaries were as able, willing or neurotically inclined as the modern reader to draw distinctions and make choices between a number of (different) possibilities. Nor that the implications of our notion of logic should have been recognized or acknowledged by (all) fifth-century Greeks. All the same it remains fascinating that these multiple divergent and sometimes contradictory expressions in the passages of Herodotus are *not* presented as *different* or *variant* explanations in an explicit manner, let alone that their mutual compatibility or incompatibility is negotiated, discussed, questioned or denied. Practically without exception

they are simply juxtaposed, conspicuously lacking even the faintest trace of helpful conjunctions such as "and" or "or." In other words, we have here an extreme instance of asyndetic expression, stressing the connotative family resemblance of the concepts involved⁹⁴ and making a fascinating issue for further reflection, which, however, is not our present concern.⁹⁵

My motives for presenting these Herodotean illustrations are the following. First and foremost, these episodes reveal in exemplary fashion the frequency and import of the terms 'gods', 'the god' or 'the divine'. Secondly, they are easily the most appropriate guides to finding the niche or the 'semantic family' of these terms in a context of connotative alternatives. Thirdly, Herodotus is particularly interesting in this respect since he adopts and further develops previous archaic thought patterns on the one hand, while foreshadowing an ensuing development on the other. So let us continue our enquiry.

On Singular Plurals

It has often been observed and valued as a conspicuous characteristic of Herodotus that in his work names of individual gods are relatively rare, at least so far as their personal interventions in human affairs are concerned.⁹⁶ Instead, especially when he voices his own conviction concerning the causes of events—either as a narrator's comment or

94. It is important to note that, in different contexts, Herodotus often does present a choice of possible and differentiated alternatives, sometimes concluding with his own preference, sometimes leaving the question open. For instance: 6.75–84, cf. Gould 1994, pp. 95–97; Harrison 1997, esp. pp. 101–4.

95. I. Lewis, *Social Anthropology in Perspective* (Harmondsworth, 1976), pp. 72–77, uses the term 'luxuriant multiplicity' to characterize the perception of cause by the Azande, a concept productively elaborated on by Gould 1989, pp. 70ff. in the context of Herodotus on causation.

96. This is hardly to be explained by an overriding 'historiographical principle' as D. Lateiner, *The Historical Method of Herodotus* (Toronto etc., 1989), pp. 64–67 argues, but is rather an example of the 'uncertainty principle', as Gould 1985, pp. 9–14 (and elsewhere, see below) argues. And cf. Harrison 1997, p. 104.

through the words of commentators in his text—Herodotus rather refers to gods, the gods, or the divine as we have just noticed.⁹⁷ This does not mean that individual gods do not appear, for instance in stories of how they defended their sanctuaries against enemy attack (Demeter 9.65; Poseidon 8.129; in more general terms 8.109).⁹⁸ But even here ambiguities soon emerge, complicating the picture. Apollo in particular is a striking example of brinkmanship. At times he is the icon of anonymous divine foreknowledge or predestination, an oracular voice rather than a personal god. On other occasions, however, he is distinctly an individual deity with a will and affections. It is precisely the amalgamation of these two ‘personalities’ in the Croesus episode that is so illustrative of the multiplicity of representations intertwining or interchanging in a dazzling shift of alternations.⁹⁹

Late-modern scholars of our time, many of whom detest paradoxes and inconsistencies as much as they fear them, try to clear Herodotus of having these vices by rescuing the unity and ‘logic’ of his theology.¹⁰⁰ For instance they reduce Apollo to a kind of personalized

97. Long ago I learned most of what is worth knowing concerning Herodotus’ religious conceptions from a work in my own language: G. C. J. Daniëls, *Religieuś-historische studie over Herodotus* (Antwerpen, 1946). On the issue at stake see esp. Linforth 1928. Following this innovative article there has been a deluge of studies on this issue. I mention: Nilsson *GGR* I, pp. 759ff.; Pötscher 1958; L. Huber, *Religieuse und politische Beweggründe des Handelns in der Geschichtsschreibung Herodots* (Tübingen, 1965); Gould 1989, esp. Ch. 4 ‘Why things happen’. Most recent and most excellent are two articles: Gould 1994 and Harrison 1997.

98. Linforth 1928, pp. 211–13, gives a complete list of (eleven) instances of direct intercourse between named gods and men. For events ascribed to named gods, see: *ibid.*, pp. 213–17; Harrison 1997, p. 104f.

99. On the general status of Apollo’s oracles and the variety of reactions and interpretations: R. T. C. Parker, ‘Greek States and Greek Oracles,’ in: P. A. Cartledge and F. D. Harvey, ed., *Cruz: Essays presented to G. E. M. de Ste. Croix* (= *History of Political Thought*, 6 [1985]), pp. 298–326.

100. Against this tendency, illuminating on the interpretation of the multiple causes in the Croesus *logos*, see Gould 1989, pp. 79ff.: ‘Closer inspection suggests that we are not dealing with the sort of unified and structured set of ideas that we are entitled to call a theory, but rather with a set of metaphors of very different implications.’ On

instrument and mouthpiece of the anonymous *theoi* (who themselves are the representation of the highest authority that controls fate), a role he certainly *can* fulfill. However, in our context they are—or at least should be—immediately whistled back by the narrator’s own explicit references to Apollo’s pronounced efforts to moderate the strict laws of Fate. As a personal god—even as a god—he is subject to the absolute superior authority of fate and the predestined. Moreover, several explanatory strategies in the outline above are downright mutually incompatible according to our—Aristotelian—conception of logic. For instance, the inescapability of fate inescapably implies the inescapability of Croesus’ error: he could never be *allowed* to understand the oracle correctly (and act accordingly), for the latter option would negate the former proposition. Thus one option simply precludes the other.¹⁰¹ Consequently, the following (provocative) assertion merits serious consideration: “untidiness, inconsistency, contradiction are the glue by which Herodotus’ religious beliefs hold together.”¹⁰²

p. 81 he calls the different explanatory generalizations *gnomai*, maxims containing a truth, which though each pretending to give general explanation, when juxtaposed in one context may provide contrasting and even mutually exclusive ‘solutions’. See his conclusion below n. 103. Cf. also Harrison 1997, p. 101: ‘Herodotus’ beliefs ... cannot be reduced to any single coherent plan ... it is precisely the inconsistencies and contradictions in his beliefs which allow them to serve as a flexible means for the explanation of events’; p. 111: ‘it would be wrong to see any simple, over-arching theological design to his work.’

101. Cf. Burkert 1996, p. 141–42: ‘The god’s answer was that the catastrophe had been ordained by fate, that there was the forefather’s offense, the crime of Gyges, and that the god had still provided a three years delay. These are three problematic excuses instead of one good one; but *chans* seemed to be saved in some small measure.’ Sometimes, but not here, this type of inconsistency is made explicit and harmonized into one framework of interpretation: e.g., the stories of Sabacus (II.139) and Aristodycus (I.158–59).

102. Harrison 1997, p. 112. I quote this phrase with deep satisfaction since my brief account of Herodotus’ beliefs is a summary of a paper given and duly torn to pieces at a conference on ‘Myth into logos?’ in 1996. The participating philologists and structuralists, a particularly inauspicious blend under the circumstances, were quick to realize the mortal danger to their *raison d’être* (as they understand it, to make every text as neatly consistent and coherent as possible). However, one participant, Thomas

Smoothing over these and similar 'irregularities', curbing or even eliminating the paradoxes and inconsistencies, is a guaranteed method for thoroughly wiping out the very signifiers that—if questioned without modern bias—may yield a profoundly revealing message.¹⁰³ Most readers, including professional readers such as scholars, says Quentin Skinner,¹⁰⁴ suffer from 'the strain towards congruence', which

Harrison, was so kind as to send me a forthcoming article in which he completely agrees on all main points with my argument. This may explain the prolific references to this article and its qualification as "excellent" in my notes. I promise to return to the issue on another occasion.

103. This is most conspicuously the case in the interpretations that seek at all costs to make Polycrates and Croesus guilty of their own fall. Thus, recently, the outdated theory that Polycrates' ring was not sufficiently valuable to save his good fortune, so that it was his own fault that the envy of the gods was not propitiated, has been revived by J. E. van der Veen *o.c.* (above n. 90). If Polycrates had followed Amasis' exemplary advice properly, he would have appeased the *phthone* of the gods. But he did not and tried to get away with it by offering a little ring instead of his 'power'. The theory is self-destructive due to its selective use of the narrative's constituent elements, especially in the flagrant disregard of Amasis' emphatic conclusion: "it is impossible for a man to save another man from what has been destined to happen." This simply proves that in the eyes of Amasis, who is lauded as an unquestioned authority by Herodotus, Polycrates and van der Veen, it is not Polycrates' miscalculation (by trying to cheat the gods), but his own miscalculation (by a wrong perception of the working of fate or 'the gods') that caused the failure. If not, he would have expressed it differently, for instance as Herodotus phrases the insight that it was Croesus' own error or guilt twice in different terms. In my view the real objective of these stories is to illustrate the bewildering multiplicity of options and viewpoints that may all play their parts in the causation of (catastrophic) events: 1) arbitrary fate or luck ('the gods') 2) too much happiness, without any personal error 3) excessive fortune, necessarily implying haughty behavior 4) personal guilt. Cf. Pötscher 1958, p. 26: "Nicht die Hybris allein bringt die Veränderung; sie kommt auch von selbst und wir suchen vergeblich, sie immer in den Kosmos unseres Denkens einzuordnen."; Gould 1989, p. 80, as the conclusion to his analysis as summarized above n. 100: "His narrative does perhaps more clearly convey the idea that the most fundamental of all human disabilities is the inability, displayed by Croesus, to understand the nature of human experience"; Harrison 1997, p. 109: "Such contradictions are ultimately irreducible."

104. Q. Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *HE&T*, 8 (1969), pp. 3–53. For a fundamental discussion see: J. G. A. Pocock, "The History of Political Thought: A Methodological Enquiry," in: P. Laslett and W. G. Runciman, ed., *Philosophy, Politics and Society* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 182–202.

is constantly nourished by their belief in 'the myth of coherence'. The assumption that as a rule authors command stable, well-considered and consistent doctrines elicits obstinate attempts to "gain coherent views of an author's system." Consequently, "any apparent barriers ... constituted by any apparent contradictions that the given writer's work does seem to contain, cannot be real barriers, because they cannot really be contradictions."¹⁰⁵ If, then, a text, a philosophical system or a historical report reveals an internal contradiction or an inconsistency somewhere, then an almost scholastic conviction that the antinomy must be 'solved', at whatever cost, seems to be the inevitable result. In contrast to this, Skinner pictures the process of thinking as an "intolerable wrestle with words and their meanings." Thus "our attempts to synthesize our views may in consequence reveal conceptual disorder at least as much as coherent doctrines."

So I suggest that we now take a deep breath and bravely prepare ourselves for the conclusion that *hoi theoi* is not always the same as *hoi theoi*, and for the even more terrifying discovery that sometimes *hoi theoi* may be the same as *hoi theos*.¹⁰⁶ In other words, (grammatical) plurality does not always imply 'many', but can refer to 'oneness'. In several of the expressions cited above it is obvious that the terms 'gods' or *daimones* are *not* intended to denote the sum total of the 30,000 individual gods that Hesiod counted.¹⁰⁷ Rather than a cumulative or

105. Here, Skinner refers to W. Harrison, "Texts in Political Theory," *Political Studies*, 3 (1955), pp. 28–44.

106. Already in the beginning of this century W. H. S. Jones, "A Note on the Vague Use of *THEOI*," *CR*, 27 (1913), pp. 252ff., referred to this as a "vague use."

107. This means that I renounce such formulations as: "Herodotus recognized the existence of numerous gods who may act as individuals on particular occasions, or who may be thought of as something like a unified group with a racial solidarity contrasting them with the race of men," as Linforth 1928, p. 218, has it, though I do accept many of his keen observations, e.g., on *theoi*: "There is actually no more mythological connotation in the word than there is in the word 'God' as used by a monotheist" (p. 219). Interestingly, Herodotus 2.52, says that "in ancient times ... the Pelasgians offered and prayed to the gods, but without any distinction of name

collective notion they represent a comprehensive one, in which the notion of plurality has practically disappeared from the semantic field of vision and which, in accordance with the immediate context, can be equated with—or at least compared to—concepts such as fate, the predestined, Fortune. In other words, in this context, *hoi theoi*, though grammatically the plural of *ho theos*, from a semantic point of view is not (at least not necessarily) so.¹⁰⁸ As such it is very much comparable with what in Greek and Latin is known as a *plurale tantum*, a word that in normal use occurs predominantly in the plural, though often referring to a singular notion.¹⁰⁹ An apposite Greek example is the (Homeric) term *dōmata* in the sense of “palace,” of which no Greek would consistently be aware that it is the plural of *dōma*, which did maintain its own—different—function of ‘house’. Indeed, as quoted earlier, “Words ... do not have ‘meanings’ in the sort of way that children have parents. They have *uses*, identifiable in particular places and periods.”

Likewise, *ho theos* or *to theion*,¹¹⁰ in the generic sense of ‘the divine authority ruling the universe’, often synonymous with ‘fate and predestination’, stands in opposition to ‘one god out of many’. The

or title—for they had not yet heard of such a thing... Long afterwards the names of the gods were brought into Greece from Egypt and the Pelasgians learned them.” See: W. Burkert, “Herodot über die Namen der Götter: Polytheismus als historisches Problem.” *MH*, 42 (1985), pp. 121–32.

108. Although I agree with François 1957, p. 308, speaking about the term *hoi theoi* in Homer: “on laisse complètement dans l’ombre les traits individuels des divers dieux pour envisager avant tout l’unité de l’ensemble.” I would in general go one step further and for later authors like Herodotus argue that *hoi theoi* is not even felt as a ‘collective’ notion. See also below, p. 127.

109. Conversely, Linforth 1928, p. 223, sees *theos* as a collective singular, and he adduces as a parallel the modern term ‘the doctor’ as an anonymous singular referring to the whole class of doctors.

110. Though I agree with the distinction by Pötscher 1958, pp. 28–29, between *theos* as the generic concept of a god interfering in human life, as opposed to the mythical gods, I cannot accept his suggestion that *to theion* is a higher abstraction encompassing these two categories. The testimonia leave no doubt that *ho theos* and *to theion* belong roughly in the same register of significance.

latter meaning of course occurs as well.¹¹¹ In some of the expressions of the Croesus *logos*, *ho theos* unequivocally refers to one individual god,¹¹² namely Apollo, who is with equal certainty *not* to be identified with fate and chance, since, according to his own confession, by his attempt to help Croesus he has opposed himself to this highest anonymous authority, to which gods of his own category (that is *not* “the gods” in the sense of a *plurale tantum*) are subjected, having only a restricted scope for intervention. So, paradoxically, both *ho theos* and *hoi theoi* may be indicative of both a polytheistic and a mon(othe)istic thought pattern.

As in our earlier discussion of Xenophanes, here again we describe two at first sight not easily compatible conceptions of the divine world, which nonetheless are both experienced as simultaneously true and valid. Nilsson (*GGR*, p. 761) was right when he wrote: “Herodot war eben so guter Polytheist wie irgendeiner seiner Zeitgenossen.” But those who have detected monotheistic tendencies in his cosmology are equally right. Again we observe two different but co-existing layers of divine conceptualization,¹¹³ each embedded in its own type of discourse, and we observe that, like Xenophanes, Herodotus saw no problem in professing a mild—albeit far from Xenophanean—‘monotheism’ side by side with a traditional polytheism.¹¹⁴ Both

111. Linforth 1928, goes as far as possible—certainly too far—in tracing either an unnamed, but nonetheless well-known individual god or “the god who is directing this affair” wherever the term *ho theos* is used. The weaknesses of this approach are exemplarily exposed by Pötscher 1958.

112. As of course often, when the identity of the god is beyond doubt. A survey in Linforth 1928, pp. 219f.

113. Pötscher 1958 is most instructive on the differentiation between ‘the god’ as a general concept and the gods of myth and cult. P. 7: “Beide Weisen, das Übernatürliche zu erfassen, als “den Gott” oder als einen aus dem reichen Götterhimmel der Griechen bestehen nebeneinander.” P. 8, he speaks of “einer gewissen Schichten-aufbau,” one layer for the experience *theos*, the other for the mythical gods.

114. This by no means indicates that Herodotus should be seen as a “follower of Xenophanes,” as has been argued by E. Hussey in an unpublished essay on ‘The

conceptions are juxtaposed and intertwined, throughout his work, and have also influenced each other. For, albeit supra-individual, the concept of the anonymous divine authority is not as purely abstract as the monotheism of Xenophanes. The mechanical working of divine retribution and compensation by 'the gods' can also be expressed in more affective terms: the universal law of alternation that the all too prosperous have to fear can alternate with divine envy, thus at least terminologically 'humanizing' the mechanical law into a more anthropomorphic affect.¹¹⁵

There is no systematization of the precise relationship between actions of personal gods and the all-embracing power of Fate: "im Schicksal sieht er das göttliche Wirken, ohne nach dem Verhältnis zwischen dem unentrinnbaren Schicksal und der göttlichen Macht zu fragen" (Nilsson *ibid.*). Nor is there any *explicit* reflection on the precise relationship between freedom and responsibility in human action and the arbitrary omnipotence of 'the gods'. Numerous are the reports of events—especially catastrophic ones—that are prepared by the gods or the god, but enacted by man (7.8a.1; 7.139.5; 8.109.3).¹¹⁶

As noted earlier, Herodotus was a *trait d'union* between the archaic period that preceded and the ideas of the fourth century and the Helle-

Religious Opinions of Herodotus" as quoted by Gould 1994, p. 94, n. 7. Nor was he a disciple of Anaximander. Thus: P. S. Derow, "Historical Explanation: Polybius and his Predecessors," in: S. Hornblower (ed.), *Greek Historiography* (Oxford, 1994), p. 78, as contested by Harrison 1997, p. 112. Their respective religious cosmologies are widely different.

115. S. Ramulf, *The Jealousy of the God and Criminal Law at Athens* (London and Copenhagen, 1933); J. Kroymann, "Götterneid und Menschenwahn: Zur Deutung des Schicksalsbegriffs im frühgriechischen Geschichtsdenken," *Saeculum*, 21 (1970), pp. 166–79; G. J. D. Aalders, "De oud-Griekse voorstelling van de afgunst der godheid," *Med. Kon. Ned. Ak. Wet.*, 38 (1975), pp. 47–65; P. Walcot, *Envy and the Greeks: A Study of Human Behaviour* (Warminster, 1978); Aalders 1979; M. W. Dickie, "Lo *phthonos* degli dei nella letteratura greca del quinto secolo a. Christo," *Atena e Roma*, 32 (1987), pp. 113–25.

116. See most recently: Harrison 1997, p. 107f., also on the technique of 'let-out clauses' involved.

nistic period that followed. The terms *ho theos*, *hoi theoi*, *to theion*, *ho daimon*, *hoi daimones* referring to an anonymous and mysteriously interfering divine (or at least supernatural) power abound in Greek idiom of all periods.¹¹⁷ The present section could have been drastically pruned if I had confined myself to summarizing the comprehensive study by G. François, *Le polythéisme et l'emploi au singulier des mots THEOS, DAIMON dans la littérature grecque d'Homère à Platon* (Paris, 1957), where all the testimonia are duly collected.¹¹⁸ But I preferred to stage the relevant terms *in action*, dazzlingly frisking around in their semantic entourage. All the same, it is gratifying to see how François' collection extends the characteristics of Herodotus' theology to different periods and authors. *Ho theos* and *ho daimon*, so he sums up, practically never denote 'un Dieu unique et personnel'. Significantly, the only exception seems to be Xenophanes, whose One God does designate one specific divine entity.¹¹⁹ Everywhere else, the singular (*ho theos*) and plural (*hoi theoi*), denoting the same idea, freely alternate in the very same contexts.¹²⁰

117. Often Zeus is preferred as a general term indicating the supreme divine power or Fate. Celebrated passages are the hymn for Zeus in Aesch. Ag. 160ff., "das eindrucksvollste Zeugnis aischyleischer Religion": A. Lesky, *Die Griechische Tragödie* (Stuttgart, 1958), p. 103. Cf. p. 65: "Zeus und Schicksal bedeuten das Gleiche." Cf. further: "Zeus is the universe—and what is still higher than this." (Aesch. Fr. 70 TrGF); Hes. *Op.* 42 and 47, where the same act is ascribed first to 'the gods', then to Zeus. See also below n. 153.

118. The attestations in Herodotus at pp. 201–9. Cf. also G. Soleri, "Politeismo e monoteismo nel vocabolario teologico della letteratura greca da Omero a Platone," *Rivista di Studi Classici*, 8 (1960), pp. 24–86.

119. As has also been emphasized by Soleri *op. cit.* (preceding note), p. 55: "*theos* e *daimon* ... mantengono costantemente un significato collettivo e generico; e nulla più ... Unica eccezione, ben singolare, è Senofane."

120. A long list of these alternations at François 1959, p. 305, n. 3. There are instances of a singular *theos* taking a verbal form in the plural, which reinforces the conclusion that "(*ho*) *theos* et (*ho*) *daimon* ont été généralement employés, au singulier, dans un sens collectif" (p. 307). G. Else, "God and Gods in Early Greek Thought," *TAPhA*, 80 (1949), pp. 24–36, mentions numerous cases of the collocation of monotheistic and polytheistic language in early Greek literature.

After Herodotus the idiom remains popular, but a significant shift becomes apparent in the rise of *Tuche* (Fortune, Luck, "die Signatur des beginnenden Hellenismus"¹²¹) as a rival designation. Fourth-century Athenian orators, for instance, continued to appeal to religious arguments for purposes of persuasion.¹²² The politicians Demosthenes, who opposed the Macedonian king Philippos, and Aeschines, who had long favoured the Macedonian, both had to admit in the end that the historical outcome of their policies was not in accordance with what they had intended or expected. Both readily took recourse to 'the God', 'to *daimonion*', or to 'Tuche', which are freely interchangeable.¹²³ Aeschin. 2.130-31: "It was Tuche first of all that ruined the Phocians, and she is mistress of all things" (*Tuchê, hê pantôn esti kuria*). Dem. *De cor.* 193: "You must not accuse me ... for the event was in god's hand not mine," which, later in Ch. 252, is varied into: "it is a stupid thing for any human being to reproach his brother man on the score of fortune." From the fourth century onwards we can follow Tuche's rise to the central position held by 'the gods' in earlier expressions. Most significantly, in the same period the 'envy of the gods' is gradually replaced by the 'enviousness of Fate'.¹²⁴

121. Nilsson *GGR*, II, p. 301.

122. For what follows I have based myself on H. Meuss, "Die Vorstellungen von Gottheit und Schicksal bei den attischen Rednern—Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der griechischen Volksreligion," *Jahrb.f. Class. Phil.*, 35 (1889), pp. 445-76; D. B. King, "The Appeal to Religion in Greek Rhetoric," *CJ*, 50 (1954-55), pp. 363-76; M. Vielberg, "Die religiösen Vorstellungen der Redner Lykurg," *RhM*, 134 (1991), pp. 49-68; H. Montgomery, "Piety and Persuasion: Mythology and Religion in Fourth-Century Athenian Oratory," in: P. Hellström and B. Alroth (eds.), *Religion and Power in the Ancient Greek World* (Proceedings of the Uppsala Symposium 1993, Uppsala, 1996), pp. 125-32. A particularly helpful, albeit slightly biased, survey: J.D. Mikalson, *Athenian Popular Religion* (Chapel Hill and London, 1983), Ch. 8 (pp. 53-62) 'The Nature of Divine Intervention', and Ch. 9 (pp. 63-73) 'The Nature of the Gods'.

123. As noted by von Wilamowitz *ad* Dem. *De cor.* 193: "nichts Bestimmtes, geschweige Persönliches wird dabei empfunden." Cf. H. Wankel, *Rede für Ktesiphon über den Kranz*, II (Heidelberg, 1976), pp. 908-10.

124. Aalders 1979. Tuche and Fate become near equivalents in this period.

Concluding Remarks

The term *hoi theoi* as the semantic plural of—and hence clearly distinct from—*ho theos*, designates the total multitude of traditional individual gods as individual gods, as exemplified in Plato's advice: "one must praise all the gods," and in the votive expression "and to (all) the other gods," added to names of gods. 'All the gods' can be addressed in prayer. They even can (and do) have cults.¹²⁵ Herodotean (*hoi*) *theoi* as a generic expression, though grammatically a plural, from a semantic point of view refers to a unity, a oneness, signifying one all-governing divine principle. Here *hoi theoi* is *not* distinct from, but on the contrary, semantically identical to *ho theos* and *to theion*. The two different notions covered by the same plural *hoi theoi*, though prone to confusion, as a rule can be well distinguished if viewed in their context. For it is the context that makes it possible for the language user to filter out from the various possible meanings of polyvalent words or expressions all except the 'desired' ones.¹²⁶ On the other hand, there is some truth in the clearly exaggerated phrase: "if a statement is considered in a fully open context ..., a man might mean by it anything that a man might mean by it."¹²⁷ Consequently, I would not be so sure which of the two possible denotations (or if one prefers: connotations) is the dominant one in the topical opening word of official decrees in Athenian inscriptions: *theoi*.¹²⁸ Concerning the relationship of monotheism and poly-

125. Already in the Linear B tablets, written 500 years before Homer, we find dedications *pa-a te-o-i* 'to all the gods'. F. Jacobi, *Pantes Theoi* (Diss., Halle, 1930).

126. Kooy, p. 141; On the stimulus-filter-response theory: Terwilliger, pp. 163ff. On 'reference' and ambiguity: Lyons I, pp. 177ff., as cited in *TER UNUS*, p. 17. Cf. Carney, pp. 105-7, *ibid.*, p. 14.

127. J. Dunn, "The Identity of the History of Ideas," *Philosophy*, 43 (1968), pp. 85-104, esp. p. 98. See for further discussion: *TER UNUS*, pp. 16ff.

128. Accordingly, there has been much guessing around about the 'real' meaning of this heading. R. L. Pounder, "The Origin of *theoi* as Inscription-Heading," in: *Studies Presented to Sterling Dow* (Durham, 1984), pp. 243-50, gives a survey and a new interpretation (p. 245): "*theoi* is not a dedicatory formula, nor a formal appeal for good

theism in Herodotus, I here summarize our findings in a fortunate formulation by Linforth:¹²⁹ "though the multiplicity of gods is never called in question, there is a disposition to speak of the divine element in the world as if it were characterized by the indivisibility of the god of the pure monotheist." "As if" is perhaps the most productive and promising strategy in religion.

Throughout their history the different notions of anonymous divine intervention share a central function: they are conceptual devices deployed to convey sense to the inexplicable by anchoring it in an ultimate authority, even if this implies the acknowledgment of the limitations of human knowledge in these matters.¹³⁰ While Xenophanes' God helps us explain *how* the (material) world *is* (hence is "good to think with"), 'the god' or 'the gods' of Herodotus (and of his predecessors and successors) help us understand *why* (catastrophic) events *happen* in human life, and so to accept them (they are "good to suffer with").¹³¹ The first is the revolutionary creation by one individual, the latter ones are molded by the collective imagery of a civilization. Together they are basic instruments "to create a world of meaning

fortune, nor an indication that suitable religious rites had been performed. Rather ... its presence on the stone may be best explained as harking back to an early religious element, imprecatory and apotropaic in nature."

129. Linforth 1928, p. 218. Although, as noted above n. 107, I cannot accept the overall view on which it is based.

130. Gould 1994, p. 94 and more extensively on the 'uncertainty principle': Gould 1985, esp. pp. 9-14.

131. For these expressions see: John Baines in this volume. "Good to think with" is perhaps the most characteristic expression of the so-called 'école de Paris' (including Vernant, after Lévi-Strauss). For a discussion Baines refers to Cl. Geertz' celebrated "Religion as a Cultural System," in: Geertz 1973, pp. 87-125. I have discussed this paradigm in religious interpretation in Versnel 1993, pp. 9ff. See also Burkert 1996, pp. 26-27: "Affliction is made bearable by an ultimate if non-empirical answer to the grieving one's question, 'why'." Cf. Harrison 1997, p. 108: "The gods act then as a kind of outside regulatory body of human attempts at justice," adding, however: "This is, of course, to reduce a complex web of religious beliefs to a simple formula." I could not agree more (with both statements).

in the context of which human life can be significantly lived."¹³² Inherent in their common function, both types of gods also share a nearly complete lack of worship in terms of statues, altars, temples, cult, and, most relevant: prayer.

While Herodotus' 'gods' may reflect either the arbitrary, or the moral or the mechanical principles of alternation or retaliation, Tuche is essentially an arbitrary and capricious power in accordance with her nature: Fortune, Luck, Chance. Not by chance it was exactly this power that from the late classical period onwards did receive divine honors, was worshipped with sacrifices and statues in temples dedicated to her, and—especially as Agathe Tuche (Good Fortune)—grew into a great goddess: an astounding strategy for 'domesticating' the fearfully arbitrary power of Chance. You cannot deify "god" or "Gods," you can deify Fortune, and so the Greeks did. Practically every *polis* had its protecting Tuche, as did the kings.¹³³ However great, the goddess remained whimsical and (for that reason?) never ousted the other gods. We shall meet this "Mistress of all things" again in the next section.

III. 'ONE IS THE GOD!'

Praising the God

Heis (ho) theos ('one is the god!'): this is the acclamation that resounded far and wide in the Greek and Roman world of the Hellenistic and Imperial era into the fourth century CE.¹³⁴ Nor is it absent from Christian literature. We recover the expression—often applied as a protec-

132. T. F. O'Dea, *The Sociology of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, 1966), p. 5.

133. Tuche is one of the most discussed gods, and there is an abundant bibliography: A. A. Burks, *PERI TUCHES* (Diss., Leiden, 1945); G. Herzog-Hauser, *RE*, VII (1948), pp. 1643-89; Nilsson *GGR*, pp. 361ff.; U. von Wilamowitz, *Der Glaube der Hellenen*, II (Darmstadt, 19593 = 19552), pp. 295-305; J. D. Mikalson, *Athenian Popular Religion* (Chapel Hill, 1983), pp. 53-62.

134. The basic collection is still Petersson 1926. Many attestations and discussion also in the works of Weinreich and Nock. There has been a host of more recent publications of single acclamations especially in papyri and on gems, and a revised and augmented edition of Petersson is a desideratum.

tive spell¹³⁵—engraved on amulets, rings, gems and other objects, inscribed on stone and written on papyri as well as in (especially religious) literature. With this acclamation we broach our third 'experiment in oneness', the theology that is generally referred to as "henotheism."

The term 'henotheism' is a modern formation by Max Müller, only later, in the study of Hellenistic religions, associated with and redefined in the light of the acclamation *heis (ho) theos*. In anticipation of a demonstration given below and in accordance with the provisional definition given above p. 87, we can for the moment state that the acclamation does not necessarily entail monotheistic notions ("there is no other god *except* this god"), although this connotation may understandably creep in from time to time.¹³⁶ As a rule, it implies a personal devotion to one god ("there is no other god *like* this god") without involving rejection or neglect of other gods. As such this acclamation reveals a shift in religious attitudes of the Hellenistic and Imperial periods that, although not strictly monotheistic and not necessarily a *praeparatio* to the adoption of monotheism, is among the most striking of all antiquity.¹³⁷ To

135. The acclamation of a god as 'one' is often closely connected with expressions of his outstanding soteriological qualities. "One is the god who heals every sickness," claims a magical papyrus published by D. Wortmann, "Neue magische Texte," *BJ*, 168 (1968), no. 7, p. 105 (= Betz *PGM*, XCIX; *Suppl. Mag.*, 33), who did not notice that this is just a slightly elaborated version of a very common acclamation: *heis theos ho boëthôn/boëthos* ('One is God the helper/healer'): Peterson 1926, *passim*.

136. Significantly, when it does, there may still remain inconsistencies: Paul (1 Cor. 8:4-6) says that "we know that . . . there is no God but one," which doubtless refers to a monotheistic conception. However, this phrase is immediately followed by "For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many gods and many lords—yet for us there is one God. . . ." This is probably the most revealing sample of henotheism. Cf. Kl. Wengst, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums* (Diss. Bonn, 1967), p. 132: "Dass diese Übernahme in den christlichen Bereich nicht eine völlige Uminterpretation im Sinne des Monotheismus bedeutete, sondern dass der elative Sinn noch erhalten blieb, zeigt der Kontext von 1 Kor 8:6, wenn Paulus die Einzigkeit des Kyrios Jesus im Gegenüber zu den vielen Kyrioi betont, deren Existenz er in v 5 einräumt."

137. Grant 1986; despite the promising title, the book does not really go into this matter.

be sure, the Mediterranean population did not *en masse* convert or adhere to henotheistic types of devotion, no more than it converted to the 'Oriental religions'. On the contrary, henotheism seems to have remained a somewhat sectarian phenomenon of an essentially competitive nature. However, this did not prevent many of its features from permeating established types of religion as well. As such it is certainly one of the most characteristic hallmarks of what Veyne 1986 calls "le second paganisme" of the second and third centuries CE. Various features, however, can be perceived long before this period, and it is here that we shall start our exposition.

As it is impossible to embark upon a detailed treatment of all the different aspects of henotheism, I select three topics for brief discussion: (1) the typical characteristics of the religious mentality implied in this conception, (2) the concept of 'oneness' in terms such as Greek *heis* (feminine: *mia*); *monos* (feminine: *monê*); and Lat. *unus/una, solus/sola*, and (3) the question of origins.¹³⁸ This disposition may cause some surprise if not suspicion: why not focus first and foremost on the denotation of the central element of henotheism: the term *heis*? The answer is that it is practically impossible to determine precisely what acclamative *heis* ('one') denotes—not surprising when dealing with acclamations¹³⁹—so that the most we can hope to recover is what the term connotes—not surprising when dealing with religious expressions. It might even be argued that acclamative *heis* does not 'denote' at all, but, instead, summarizes—hence evokes—a set of connotations, without which the expression cannot be understood at all. However, a quest for connotations requires insight into the religious ambience in which the predicate *heis* belongs, in other words a delineation of the religious *Sitz im Leben* of henotheism. In order to achieve this we shall proceed in two steps.

138. For all three issues I have drawn heavily on my book *TER UNUS*, to which the reader should refer for more ample substantiation of what I am here summarizing.

139. See *infra* pp. 147ff.

First, we shall focus our attention on the goddess Isis. Not only was she an eminently henothistic deity in that she was consistently (and one of the first to be) acclaimed as being "One," but her specific qualities were also lauded in extensive hymns, called 'aretalogies' or 'praises'. A brief summary of one such aretalogy will also offer the most convenient avenue to a first, provisional discussion of the ethno-cultural roots of this belief system. Next, more generally, we shall draw up an inventory of the most conspicuous elements of the theology involved as exemplified in a variety of different religious expressions, all of them indicative of the religiosity concerning gods who are praised as 'one', or at the least as uniquely great.

Aretalogy

An aretalogy is a laudatory description of the miraculous power (*arete*) of a god. The longest and best known is the Isis aretalogy of Kume¹⁴⁰ (hereafter referred to as K). Like other samples of these liturgical panegyrics, often publicized as a token of gratitude and/or for propagandistic purposes, it was written on stone.¹⁴¹ The remarkable similarity of the various versions of this aretalogy that have come down to us strongly suggests a common origin. Half a century of fierce scholarly debate has not yielded a consensus on the original nature of the sup-

140. Apart from many specialized studies and editions of various versions of the same aretalogy in other inscriptions or literary texts, the text of K can be found, e.g., in W. Peek, *Der Isishymnus von Andros und verwandte Texte* (Berlin, 1930); R. Harder, *Karpokrates von Chalkis und die memphitische Isispropaganda*, *Abh. Berlin*, 1943 (1944), Grandjean 1975, *IG XII Suppl.*, pp. 98–99, Totti, 1985, no. 1. A translation in: F. C. Grant, *Hellenistic Religions* (Indianapolis, 1980 = 1953), pp. 131–33. For full bibliography and discussion of K and other aretalogies, the genre aretalogy in general, its nature and origin, I refer to *TER UNUS*, pp. 37–52.

141. Besides these aretalogies there were other means of extolling the majesty of the god(dess), for instance by relating a specific miracle or even by collecting these stories in miracle books. The two types could be combined, as for example in the hymn of Maronea (Grandjean 1975). Many of these *aretai* are reproduced by Longo 1969. They are discussed by Nock 1933, pp. 84ff., MacMullen 1981, pp. 10ff., Versnel 1981a, pp. 54–62, with special attention to the aspect of *marturia*.

posed prototype, whose cradle, according to legend, stood in Memphis. On the one hand they display numerous non-Greek, especially Egyptian, elements that are obvious to any reader and denied by none. Not only are they unequivocally present in such proclamations as: "I invented the letters together with Hermes (= Egyptian Thoth)" (K 3c), or "I am the wife and sister of Osiris" (K 6), but also in "I divided earth from heaven" (K 12), an act of creation of which no Greek god could boast.¹⁴² Stylistically, a series of *Ego*-proclamations in which a god proclaims his wondrous powers (*dunamis*) is un-Greek.¹⁴³ The same can be said of the typically 'oriental' expression of omnipotence composed of two polar qualities such as "I soothe the sea and make it turbulent" (K 43) and "I make the navigable unnavigable whenever it pleases me" (K 50).¹⁴⁴ Nor is it easy to find, in Greek literature, a *parallelismus membrorum* like the one at the end of the Isis aretalogy cited *infra*, although neither trope is completely lacking.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, in 1949 the two major experts on Hellenistic religion, A. D.

142. See *supra* n. 26. I do not recognize anything really comparable in Hestod *Th.* 126ff.: 173ff., to which F. Solmsen, *Isis among the Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge [Mass.], 1980), p. 133, n. 48, refers. The new fragments of an Orphic theogony in the Derveni Papyrus (*ZPE*, 47 [1982]) and cf. M.L. West, *The Orphic Poems* [Oxford, 1983], pp. 68–115; A. Laks and G. W. Most, ed., *Studies in the Derveni Papyrus*, [Oxford, 1997]) do explain the castration of Ouranos by Kronos as the separation of heaven and earth. But there cannot be any doubt as to the strong Near-Eastern influences here, since the same text adds that Zeus swallowed the genitals of Ouranos and became pregnant, which is clearly borrowed from the Kumarbi myth. See: W. Burkert, "Oriental and Greek Mythology: The Meeting of Parallels," in: Bremmer 1987, pp. 10–40, esp. 22.

143. See for a discussion: *TER UNUS*, p. 43, n. 10.

144. There are even stronger statements of this type in *P. Oxy* 1380 (Totti 1985 no. 20), ll. 195–96: "you, mistress of growth and destruction," and above all ll. 175–77: "and you give destruction to whom you like, and to those that are destroyed you give growth." Fowden 1986, p. 49, deems it likely that part of the invocation is a translation from an Egyptian text. No need to say that this type of expression is particularly characteristic of the Old Testament, for instance, Deut 32:39, "I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal."

145. The evidence in: *TER UNUS*, p. 43, n. 11.

Nock and A. J. Festugière,¹⁴⁶ independently (and forcefully) attacked the theory of a *monolithic* Egyptian origin, contending that the original text must have been written in Greek since it contained numerous basically Greek concepts. For reasons of space I cannot go into this discussion here and shall only repeat my personal conviction that the aretalogies of Isis are a genuinely Hellenistic creation—comparable to the creation of the god Sarapis himself—in which Greek elements have amalgamated with Egyptian-oriental ones.¹⁴⁷

In the first line of the aretalogy of Kume, Isis proclaims her absolute sovereignty: "I am Isis, the mistress of every land." Then a breathless series of some fifty *Ego* proclamations articulates the goddess as the one who has created (divided) heaven and earth, who has defined the laws of nature and who (sometimes arbitrarily) manipulates the physical elements. Having invented agriculture, it is she who has initiated social order and civilization by introducing language, justice, religion, moral codes and love. After a preliminary formula of omnipotence in ll. 46–47, "What pleases me, that shall be finished; for me everything makes way," the hymn ends with the unsurpassed and unsurpassable climax (ll. 55–56):

I overcome Fate,
Fate harkens to me.

The two lines can be understood as comprehensive formulas in which Isis' supremacy over life and death, including sickness, perils and

146. A. D. Nock, *Gnomon*, 21 (1949), pp. 221–28 = Nock 1972 II, pp. 703–11; A. J. Festugière, "A propos des arétalogies d'Isis," *HTHR*, 42 (1949), pp. 209–34 = Festugière 1972, pp. 138–63. For a full discussion see: *TER UNUS*, pp. 41–44.

147. As argued in *TER UNUS*. This is also the opinion of major specialists such as L. Vidman, J. Leclant, J. Gwyn Griffiths, G. Fowden. This view is supported by an undeniable similarity to the Egyptian hymns for Isis found at Philae and published by L. V. Zabkar, "Six Hymns to Isis in the Sanctuary of her Temple at Philae and their Theological Significance," *JEA*, 69 (1983), pp. 115–37; *idem*, *Hymns to Isis in Her Temple at Philae* (Hanover and London, 1988), belonging to the period of Ptolemy II Philadelphos.

disaster, is proclaimed. The first hymn of Isidorus¹⁴⁸ (2nd or 1st c. B.C.) 26–34, articulates this in exemplary soteriological formulas:

Deathless Saviour, many-named, mightiest Isis,
Saving from war cities and all their citizens:
Men, their wives, possessions and children.
As many as are bound fast in prison, in the power of death,
As many as are in pain through anguished, sleepless nights,
All who are wanderers in a foreign land,
And as many as sail on the Great Sea in winter
When men may be destroyed and their ships wrecked and sunk,
All are saved if they pray that You be present to help.

Line 29 has literally: "in the fatal destiny of death." This is a crucial formula, for, like the final lines of the aretalogy of Kume, it represents an early anticipation of what was to develop into one of Isis' most specific qualities during the imperial period. From the beginning of the second century CE onwards, we find Isis glorified for having the power to shift the boundaries that determine the measured time of life, i.e., for being victorious over fate.¹⁴⁹ In this she is matched by her consort Sarapis, who proclaims:¹⁵⁰ "for I change the Fate" (lit. "change the clothes of Fate"). This is a commentary as it were on K 55/6 quoted above, and though certainly not an assurance of blissful immortality in the netherworld,¹⁵¹ it definitely exalts Isis above the ranks of other gods, and in particular the Greek gods, to whom, as we saw above, Herodotus' words applied: "fate cannot be escaped, not even by a

148. Found in 1935 at Medinet Madî in the Fayum. The major publication is: Vanderlip 1972, whose text and translation I adopt. Cf. also: É. Bernand, *Les inscriptions métriques de l'Égypte gréco-romaine* (Paris, 1969), pp. 631–52; Totti 1985 no. 21ff.

149. E.g., Apul. *Metam.* 11.6, "you shall know that I alone have power to prolong your life also beyond the span determined by your destiny"; cf. 11.25.

150. In a papyrus of the 3rd c. CE. Ed. pr. Abt. *ARW*, 18 (1915), p. 257. Totti 1985 no. 12, where a full bibliography is presented. Cf. also Wenreich 1969, I, p. 410.

151. As Cumont once understood it. See: *TER UNUS*, pp. 47–49.

god."¹⁵² As we have seen, the only Greek god who sometimes managed to ransom a favorite mortal from death, albeit for a limited period, was Apollo,¹⁵³ and the notion of divine victory over Fate or Predestination is not documented before the imperial period in religious texts outside Egypt.¹⁵⁴ A goddess who has the unique¹⁵⁵ power to overcome destiny and liberate men from the chafing bonds of inescapable fate may become a new Fate herself. And here, as promised above, Tuche¹⁵⁶ emerges again. For Isis was sometimes identified with

152. A funerary inscription (*Syll.* 3 889) informs us that "neither by flattery, nor by supplication, nor by tears will man ever be able to overstep the boundaries of the predestined," thus summarizing a stock *topos* in literature which ranges from early lyric via Hellenistic poetry into epigrams, philosophical and astrological works of the Roman period. Cf. H. Wankel, "Alle Menschen müssen sterben", Variationen eines Topos der griechischen Literatur," *Hermes*, 111 (1983), pp. 129-34.

153. Hdt. 1, 91; cf. R. Riecks, "Eine tragische Erzählung bei Herodot," *Poetica*, 7 (1975), pp. 23-44, esp. 32; Aeschyl. *Eum.* 723ff.; Eur. *Alc.* prol.; cf. J. M. Bell, "Euripides' *Alcestis*. A Reading," *Emerita*, 48 (1980), pp. 43-76, on the inevitability of *ananke* (here = inescapable fate). Even in the 250s CE, Apollo still recalled how he had "shamed" the Fates and kept off an epidemic a century before: Lane Fox 1986, p. 231. On the other hand the prolongation of life is among the normal capabilities of Egyptian gods: Nock 1972 II, p. 705, n. 7; Gwyn Griffiths 1975, p. 166.

154. In fact, the final lines of aretology K, whose model can be dated to the third or second century BCE, are so exceptional in the context of Hellenistic religion that they were explained as a later addition by no less a specialist than Festugière. However, he recanted a few years later.

155. Zeus holding the scales of destiny in Homer is a rare exception to the rule. The Zeus who, in lyric poetry and sometimes in tragedy, is pictured as the highest lord of destiny (as e.g., in Archiloch. fr. 298 W.; cf. U. Bianchi, *Dios Asa. Destino, uomini e divinità nell' epos, nelle teogonie e nel culto dei Greci* [Rome, 1953]) may practically be identified with such notions as *hoi theoi*, *ho theos* and *to thion*, as we demonstrated earlier. Even the Christian god, once beyond the boundaries of the theologians' protectorate, is powerless against the Fates: G. A. Megas, *ARH*, 30 (1933), p. 3; R. W. Brednick, *Völkserzählungen und Volksglaube von den Schicksalsfrauen* (FF Communications, 193, Helsinki, 1964), pp. 31ff. In early Christian theology Christ or the Virgin Mother competes with Isis in the combat against Fate. They share this task with the great god of Gnostic and Hermetic speculation, also present in magical papyri. Outside this 'theosophy' the notion is rare.

156. J. Bergman, "I overcome Fate, Fate harkens to me. Some Observations on Isis

Tuche, though in contradistinction to the blind and arbitrary Fortune, she was a seeing and helpful one. The combat between the two is glorified in Apuleius *Metam.* 11.15.

All this has a consequence of crucial importance: a goddess who triumphs over Fate and moreover boasts an extensive series of matchless miraculous feats may lay claim to the most lofty titles. So Isis does in the first line of the aretology by calling herself sovereign (lit. *tyrannos*: tyrant) of all the land, in Egyptian ears probably referring to the land Egypt, in the Greek perception, no doubt understood as the whole civilized world. No god or goddess has such a variety of titles indicating unlimited power and sovereignty. The most frequent are: Queen (*basilissa*), Mistress (*despoina*, *anassa*) and Lady (*kuria*).¹⁵⁷ This divine absolutism in many respects imitates the model of the worldly autocracy so typical of Hellenistic kingship.¹⁵⁸

If we now try to summarize the picture delineated so far we can best quote the famous cheers of the Ephesians (who apparently were addicted to acclamations) that "Isis is a great goddess."¹⁵⁹ "Great" is the most natural and common designation to indicate that the goddess

as a Goddess of Fate," in: Ringren, ed., *Fatalistic Beliefs in Religion, Folklore and Literature* (Stockholm, 1967), pp. 35-51; F. Dunand, *Le culte d'Isis dans le bassin oriental de la Méditerranée* (Leiden, 1973) I, pp. 92f.; III, pp. 271-73; Gwyn Griffiths 1975, pp. 241-44; *idem*, "The Concept of the Divine Judgement in the Mystery Religions," in: U. Bianchi, and M. J. Vermaseren, ed., *La soteriologia dei culti orientali nell' impero Romano* (Leiden, 1982), pp. 192-219, esp. pp. 199f.

157. Collection and discussion: *TER UNUS*, p. 66.

158. Most especially the curious amalgamation of liberation and subjection, which is not of direct concern to our present issue, mirrors the two sides of Hellenistic monarchy, as I have argued at length in *TER UNUS* and in: "Religious Projection: A Hellenistic Instance," in: L. Martin, ed., *Religious Transformations and Socio-Political Change* (Berlin and New York, 1993), pp. 25-39.

159. Xen. *Ephes.* 5, 13. Cf. *PGM*, XXIV, 1, and parallels in Peterson 1926, p. 208. Cf. R. Merkelbach, *Roman und Mysterium in der Antike* (Munich and Berlin, 1962), pp. 111f.; Gwyn Griffiths 1975, p. 238. Cf. Isis in an ancient glossary: "Isis, that is the great hope." *P. Oxy.* XLV, (1977), p. 3239. This may refer to dream interpretations, as M. Marcovich, *ZPE*, 29 (1978), p. 49, has suggested. For *elpis* in religious context see: F. Cumont, *Lux perpetua* (Paris, 1949), pp. 401-5; Versnel 1985, p. 256ff.

towers above all other gods. And this, of course, is exactly the briefest summary of the hyperbolic *Ego*-proclamations in the aretalogy: Isis can achieve what no other god is able to. She is not only great, she is *eminently and uniquely* great. In other words, she is the great champion in a divine competition for omnipotence. Now, there are also other ways to express this. In another aretalogy¹⁶⁰ Isis claims: "I, Isis, am the *one and only* sovereign of this era" (*egō turannos Isis aiōnos monē*). 'Alone', 'without rival', 'unique(ly)', that is what terms such as Greek *monos/monē*, used here as elsewhere for Isis, denote, and as such they are a further fitting summary of the aretalogies. The term also brings us very close to that other expression Greek *heis* (fem. *mia*), Latin *unus/una*, with which the goddess is stereotypically acclaimed. *P. Oxy* 1380, l.6 even calls her *tēn mian*: "the One." So it will be helpful to go into the meanings and functions of the term *monos*, as we shall shortly do. But let us first have a glance at the more general characteristics of henotheistic religiosity, as collected from a broad range of evidence concerning Hellenistic gods (very much including Isis again) who—in opposition to the gods of classical Greece—claim a unique and superior status associated with the notion of omnipotence.

Nine Characteristics of Henotheistic Religion

Besides being 'one'—whatever that may imply—the henotheistic gods of the Hellenistic era such as Isis and Sarapis lay claim to modes of adoration that are often radically different from the ones known for the traditional Greek gods. I have drawn a list of nine of these characteristics and will in each case give only one or two illustrations.

1. Cosmopolitan pretensions and claims to universal worship are highly characteristic of great Hellenistic gods, especially of Isis. For instance: "all mortals who live on the boundless earth, Thracians, Greeks, and Barbarians, speak Your fair Name, a Name honored

160. Aretalogy of Cyrene, *SEG*, IX (1938), p. 192.

among all."¹⁶¹ Compare the expression "Tyrant of all lands" in the Kume aretalogy.

2. If it is true that "miracle proved deity" (A.D. Nock), it is no less true that, apart from a few scattered earlier instances, the first traces of a *structural* advertising function of miracles in Greece can be discovered in the late Classical miracle records of Asclepius at Epidaurus (fourth century BCE). Significantly, the earliest epigraphical attestation of the term *aretē* as the expression of a miraculous deed of a deity likewise dates from the fourth century BCE.¹⁶² Both thus mark the dawn of the Hellenistic era. For, indeed, miracles and epiphanies *adduced as proof of the greatness of a god* are among the most characteristic features of the Hellenistic and Roman period.¹⁶³ Isis and Sarapis frequently exacted obedience and worship through visions or miracles, and the same is true for other gods, including the god of the Christians.

3. *Makarismoi*, that is, expressions of beatitude due to divine blessings, are a common feature of Hellenistic piety. The curious confessions of personal devotion and the concomitant beatitude as exemplarily expressed in the eleventh book of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* have no exact parallel in classical literature, with the exception of Euripides' *Bacchae*.¹⁶⁴

161. The phrase is taken from one of the most extensive 'topographical' catalogues, viz. the first Isiac hymn of Isidorus ll.14ff. (Totti 1985 no. 21), the most extensive being *P. Oxy* 1380. In her commentary Vanderlip 1972, *ad loc.* gives a survey of parallel expressions. Indicative are further fixed epithets such as: *poluonumos* and *murionumos* ('with many/innumerable names').

162. *Syll.* 3 1131, whose importance has been duly valued by A. Krieger, *Aretologische Studien* (Leipzig, 1929), p. 21f. and cf. Grandjean 1975, pp. 11f.

163. One fine example: *P. Oxy* 1382 (Totti 1985 no. 13) gives the title of a book "The Miracle (*aretē*) of Zeus Helios, great Sarapis, done to Synion the Pilot." In the preceding section a miracle is described in a passage whose final words are: "This miracle is recorded in the libraries of Mercurium. Do all of you who are present say, 'There is one Zeus Sarapis'."

164. As demonstrated in the second chapter of *TER UNUS*. A good second is Euripides' *Ion* 130ff., and his *Hippolytos*.

4. Although, naturally, 'great' is a common epithet of gods,¹⁶⁵ emphatic acclamations of greatness are exceptional in the classical period but abound in Hellenistic and Roman henotheistic ideology. In these periods "the desire to be magnified" (Eur. *Bacchae* 209) is structurally reflected in endless 'magnifications', most emphatically documented in the curious confessional inscriptions from North Eastern Lydia and the bordering area of Phrygia¹⁶⁶ dating from the second and third centuries CE. Their frequent *exordium*: "Great is (the god) NN" is a ritualized acclamation. The ritual cheering was readily put into action as a propagandistic weapon in the struggle between pagans and Christians: "Great is the Artemis of the Ephesians" shouted the inhabitants of Ephesus for two full hours in a henotheistic attempt to stop an advancing monotheism. And the Christians never stopped yelling back.¹⁶⁷

5. Cultic worship is the natural privilege of a god. Terms like 'to serve' (*therapeuō*), of course, occur in Greek religious texts of all periods. But the interpretation of such service as a personal submission or devotion to the god, even to the extent of being 'possessed' or 'enslaved' by the deity, is definitely foreign to classical religiosity.¹⁶⁸ In classical literature a few passages in Euripides' tragedy the *Ion* come

165. B. Müller, *Megas Theos* (Diss., Halle, 1913); M. Bissinger, *Das Adjektiv megas in der griechischen Dichtung* (1966).

166. Collected with a commentary by Petzl 1994.

167. In the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, the crowd generally exclaims "Great is the god of the Christians" (or "of Peter" or "of Paul"). On these and comparable Christian acclamations see: *TWNT*, s.v. *megas, kunos*; V. H. Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions* (Leiden, 1963), pp. 51–68; K. Wengst, *Christologische Formen und Lieder des Urchristentums* (Bonn, 1967), pp. 123–36. Consequently, the faithful adherent often underlines his sense of inadequacy in attempting to describe the greatness of the god: "for it is within the reach of gods alone and not of mortals, to describe the mighty deeds of the gods" says *P.Oxy* 1381, ll. 40f., one of many examples of this expression. Totti 1985 no. 15. Cf. Grandjean 1975, pp. 38–44.

168. W. L. Westermann, "The Freedmen and the Slaves of God," *PAPhS*, 92 (1948), p. 56; K. H. Rengsdorff, *doulos*, *TWNT* II (1935), p. 267. For all relevant evidence and a fundamental discussion I refer to Pleket 1981.

close to it, but here the protagonist was a temple slave, a position that may have influenced the terminology.¹⁶⁹ In actual cult there is even less.¹⁷⁰ On the other hand, structural symptoms of personal or collective surrender to a god, frequently in the form of sacred slavery, are rife in later periods.¹⁷¹ A fixed technical terminology indicates both the monk-like submission of, for example, the devotees of henotheistic Sarapis and the sovereignty of the local god holding sway over Maeonian villages,¹⁷² whose inhabitants regarded their gods as monarchs and themselves as the slaves of the deity.

6. With the exception of a few isolated cases of ostentatious atheism,¹⁷³ refusal to worship is an unknown phenomenon in the archaic and classical periods.¹⁷⁴ In fact, the term 'faith' is of little avail

169. Especially *Ion* 151f.: "Oh, I would that my service to Apollo might never end..." Cf. Pleket 1981, 164f. On the specific piety in the *Ion* see also: H. Yunis, *A New Creed: Fundamental Religious Beliefs in the Athenian Polis and Euripidean Drama* (Göttingen, 1988), pp. 121–38.

170. On the *nympholeptos* (a term often used to indicate religious bigotry), see the case of Archedemos from Thera who decorated a cave in Attica in ca. 460 BCE, laid out a garden for it, and did everything in honor and on the instructions of the nymphs, by whom he was 'seized' or 'possessed': *IG* I2, 784, 785, 788. Extensively discussed by N. Himmelmann-Wildschütz, *Theoleptos* (Marburg, 1957). Cf. also: Van Straten 1976, p. 19 and notes 264–68; Pleket 1981, p. 162f.; W. R. Connor, "Seized by the Nymphs: Nympholepsy and Symbolic Expression in Classical Greece," *ClAnt*, 7 (1988), pp. 155–89.

171. I have analyzed these servile attitudes in *TER UNUS*, Ch. I.

172. On the terminology see especially P. Herrmann, "Men, Herr von Axiotta." In: *Studien zur Religion und Kultur Kleinasiens. Festschrift F. K. Dörner* (Leiden, 1978), pp. 415–24 and Pleket 1981, p. 162f. and p. 177.

173. M. Winiarczyk, "Wer galt im Altertum als Atheist?" *Philologus*, 128 (1984), pp. 157–83, provides a full list of examples.

174. "Il n'y a pas de place, dans ce système, pour le personnage du renonçant," says J.-P. Vernant, *L'individu, la mort, l'amour: Soi-même et l'autre en Grèce ancienne* (Paris, 1989), p. 213, speaking of the inclusive cultic world of fifth-century Athens. Challenges to the gods as expressed in the myths of Tantalos, Niobe, Arachne and Marsyas are of a decidedly different nature and allude to the sin of *hybris* and its consequences rather than to lack of faith in the existence of the god. W. Nestle, "Legenden vom Tod der Gottesverächter," *ARW*, 33 (1936), pp. 246–69; Chr. Sourvinou-Inwood,

in defining archaic and classical forms of belief, since the pantheon of the *polis* was as self-evident and unquestioned as the *polis* and her socio-cultural codes.¹⁷⁵ The refusal to believe in and, consequently, to honor a particular god—characteristics of the *theomachos* ('one who fights against god', e.g., in *Acts* 5: 39)—becomes a veritable *topos* in the legends of the expansion of the demanding and imperious Hellenistic gods and cults. "Let the unfaithful see, let them see and recognize their error" (*videant irreligiosi, videant et errorem suum recognoscant*), says the Isis priest after Lucius' miraculous recovery in *Apul. Metam.* 11.15.¹⁷⁶ The Maeonian confession inscriptions, where trespasses against gods or humans are explained by preference as tokens of deficient faith and therefore as contempt of the god, often end with the formula: "I warn all mankind not to hold the god in contempt, for they shall have this

"Crime and Punishment: Tityos, Tantalos and Sisyphos in *Odyssey* 11," *BICS*, 33 (1986), pp. 37–58.

175. This has long been recognized as one of the most characteristic distinctions between the religion of the classical *polis* and the confessional creeds in Hellenistic and later periods. Although J. Kinneavy, *Greek Rhetorical Origins of Christian Faith* (Oxford, 1988) has argued that the concept of *pistis* rooted in classical rhetoric, that is, of faith as a conscious choice and involving acts of conversion, is, as was powerfully argued by Nock 1933, practically restricted to heno- and monotheistic creeds. There is a significant Epidaurian inscription (no. 3 Herzog) in which a person who mocks the *iamata* ('healings') of Asklepios is punished for his *apistia* by an illness which is only cured after his 'conversion'. Henceforth his name will be Apistos. This is the same terminology and ideology as we see in the confessional texts of the second century CE. In *TAM*, V, 1, p. 179b, a person is punished *dia to apistein* ('because of his disbelief'). On the idea of *pistis* in the New Testament see: Chr. D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge, 1989). On difficulties involved in the application of the concept 'belief' in general see: R. Needham, *Belief, Language and Experience* (Cambridge, 1972).

176. Cf. *P. Oxy* 1381 (Totti 1985 no. 15) ll. 204–5, after an incitement to propagate the faith in Imouthes Asclepius (following a miraculous cure), the pious are welcomed, whereas conversely: "Go hence, o envious and impious ones." Vettius Valens 9 pr., p. 331, 12, hopes that his exposition will convince the *amathesis kai theomachoi* ('the ignorant and fighters against god'). Note that in an Epidaurian miracle (no. 4 Herzog), Asklepios orders an unbeliever to sacrifice a silver sow as a "testimony of her stupidity." See for further interesting examples: Norden 1923, pp. 6ff. and 134ff.; Nock 1933, p. 4 and 88; Gwyn Griffiths *ad Apul. Metam.* 11.15.

stele as an admonition." Apparently, the theme of the impious unbeliever only becomes relevant when it concerns either a god who still has to conquer a place in the cult, or one whose claims are substantially greater than those of the ancient gods of the *polis*, whose cult formed an unquestioned part of *polis* tradition. In these cases the words of a Sarapis devotee apply: "for a mortal cannot contradict Lord Sarapis."¹⁷⁷

7. Any attempt to match oneself against a god is fatal folly. Gods are invincible, and the human rebel is doomed to get the worst of it. Characteristically, this theme, though not unknown (Tantalos, Sisyphos, etc.), was not exploited for propagandistic ends in classical times. In that period, substantiating the invincibility of a god was deemed superfluous. Conversely, the epithet 'invincible' (Gr. *anikētos*, Lat. *invictus*) became very popular in the Hellenistic and Roman periods,¹⁷⁸ particularly in the competition between various henotheistic movements in imperial times: 'Sarapis wins'¹⁷⁹ is a common variant of the acclamations 'Great' or 'One (is) Sarapis'. "We shall win" says the god to his priest in the Delian Sarapis aretology, l. 27. The futility of resisting a god and the divine triumph over atheists or sinners is a *topos* in the confessional texts and related genres,¹⁸⁰ where, as we have seen, the

177. P. Michigan inv. 4686. Ed. H. C. Youtie and J. G. Winter, *Pap. Mich.*, 8, 511; Totti 1985 no. 49.

178. The evidence in S. Weinstock, "Victor and Invictus," *HThR*, 50 (1957), pp. 211–47; *idem*, *RE*, VIII, A2 (1958), pp. 2485–500 and 2501–42, s.v. 'victor' and 'victoria'.

179. Weinreich 1969, I, pp. 426–28, and 438–40; also on the Christian response: Peterson 1926, pp. 152–63; H. Engelmann, *The Delian Aretology of Sarapis* (Leiden, 1975), p. 24.

180. A very important related text is the well-known sacred law of a cult group around the goddess Agdistis at Philadelphia in Lydia (second to first centuries BCE). After the basic discussion by O. Weinreich, *SbHeidelberg* 1919, there is a good treatment by S. C. Barton and G. H. R. Horsley, "A Hellenistic Cult Group and the New Testament Churches," *JbAC*, 24 (1981), pp. 7–41. In lines 31ff. we read that a man or woman who is guilty of the aforementioned acts shall not enter the *oikos*: "for great are the gods set up in it, they watch over these things and will not tolerate those who transgress the ordinances," and in ll. 50ff.: "they shall hate such people and inflict upon them great punishments."

consequences of human resistance have the function of an 'admonition' or 'testimony'.

8. *Theomachoi* ('those who fight against god[s]') are severely punished. The penalties inflicted upon rebels in archaic Greek myths such as those of Tantalos and Sisypchos are exemplary. Both in myth and legend (but only rarely in history) we find above all blindness and madness,¹⁸¹ besides other kinds of illnesses and afflictions, as specific expressions of divine wrath.¹⁸² Historically, however, the punishment of mortals who resist (the coming of) a god does not become topical until the Hellenistic and imperial periods.¹⁸³ The forerunners are discernible in some Epidaurian inscriptions praising the god Ascle-

181. Full documentation in: *TER UNUS*, p. 202. On illnesses in confession texts: A. Chanotis, "Illness and cures in the Greek propitiatory inscriptions and dedications of Lydia and Phrygia," in: Ph. J. van der Flijk, H. F. J. Horstmanhoff, P. H. Schrijvers, ed., *Ancient Medicine in its Socio-Cultural Context*, II (Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1995), pp. 323-44. Cf. also the next note.

182. W. Speyer, 'Fluch', *RAC*, 7 (1969), pp. 1179f. and 1112-14; *idem*, 'Gottesfeind', *RAC*, 11 (1981), pp. 996-1043, esp. 1017-19; pp. 1025f.; and 1037-39; *idem*, "Zorn der Gottheit, Vergeltung und Sühne," in: U. Mann, ed., *Theologie und Religionswissenschaft* (Darmstadt, 1973), *passim*; B. W. Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy* (London, 1973), pp. 252-55; L. Robert, *Hellenica*, XI-XII, p. 439. In Christian context: E. Heck, *Mé theomachein oder: Die Bestrafung des Göttesverächters. Untersuchungen zu Bekämpfung und Aneignung römischer Religie bei Tertullian, Cyprian und Lactanz* (Frankfurt, 1987). The numerous oracles concerning personal or epidemic diseases and afflictions attributed to divine anger generally pertain to trespasses against religious or ritual rules and are especially concerned with purity. Cf. particularly the subtle and differentiated discussion by R. C. T. Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 235-56, and A. Chanotis, "Reinheit des Körpers - Reinheit des Sinnes in den griechischen Kultgesetzen," in: J. Assmann and Th. Sundermeier, ed., *Studien zum Verstehen fremder Religionen*, 9: Schuld, Gewissen und Person (Gütersloh, 1997), pp. 142-79.

183. It is significant that Weinreich 1909, s.v. "Strafwunder," besides some well-known mythical and legendary miracles (especially the ones performed by images of heroes [cf. the famous case of Theagenes] and the instances from Epidaurus mentioned above) takes his entire evidence from Hellenistic and above all Roman times. Parker *op. cit.* (preceding note) stresses the fatalistic views on illness, etc., in the archaic period and for the classical period draws our attention to the complex attitudes to divine (though often amoral) and natural causation in cases of illness.

pius,¹⁸⁴ and we have seen examples in the resistance legends associated with Sarapis, especially the Delian aretalogy, in which the adversaries of the god are "like statues struck by the god" and cannot utter a sound. Saul, who was (temporarily) blinded, is structurally to be equated with Apuleius' Lucius who became a donkey. The punishments are explicitly referred to as demonstrations of the powerfulness of the particular god in question. Divine triumph or punishment is called "worthy of his power or majesty" in various texts.¹⁸⁵ Whoever wishes to be convinced of the ubiquity of punitive miracles in Hellenistic and imperial times will find rich evidence in such sources as the collections of Maeonian confession texts and in Lactantius *De mortibus persecutorum*.¹⁸⁶

9. Public confession of guilt towards the god, either as a token of reverence or as an instrument of propaganda or both, is not found in our sources before the fourth-century miracle records from Epidaurus.¹⁸⁷ In this collection there are three instances of people who confess their mistakes and subsequently are healed by the god.¹⁸⁸ These

184. See above nn. 175f. and cf. Weinreich 1909, p. 88.

185. Delian Sarapis aretalogy l. 27/8. In a bronze tablet from Asia Minor, the Mother of the Gods is requested to "punish [some unknown thieves] in a manner worthy of her power." A recently found Latin tablet from Belo (Spain) asks the goddess: *fac tuo numini maestati exemplana*. A variant expression on a Delian lead tablet, where the Syrian gods are implored to "punish and give expression to your wondrous power": Ph. Bruneau, *Recherches sur les cultes de Délos à l'époque hellénistique et à l'époque impériale* (Paris, 1970), pp. 650ff. A prayer of revenge asks for retaliation "that I may see your power": G. Björck, *Der Fluch des Christen Sabinus* (Papyrus Upsaliensis 8) (Uppsala, 1938), p. 46, no. 24; another asks, "let the evildoers be pursued... Lord, quickly show them your might" (Björck 6).

186. See generally Weinreich 1909.

187. R. Pettazzoni, "Confession of Sins and the Classics," *HThR*, 30 (1937), pp. 7ff., mentions Menander fr. 544 K (Porphyrt. *De abst.* IV, 15) on the followers of the Dea Syria as the first literary record of public confession of sins. Cf. S. Eitrem, "Kultsünden und Gottesverleugner," *SMSR*, 13 (1937), pp. 244f.; MacMullen 1981, p. 32.

188. They are discussed by F. Kudlien, "Beichte und Heilung," *Medizinhistorisches Journal*, 13 (1978), pp. 1-14, esp. 5f.

scattered and incidental instances are the first hesitant signs of a mentality that in its institutionalized form and with much greater rigidity became particularly typical of (though by no means restricted to) the Maeonian confession texts, who took their name from it.¹⁸⁹ These texts, which are essentially concise aretalogies and accordingly frequently begin with a *meḡas* acclamation, offer reasons for their own inscription: as a rule, an offence against a god or human being; next, punishment by the god, mostly in the form of illness or even death; the public confession of the lapse, sometimes followed by an act of divine mercy, for instance recovery from the illness; and finally, the formulaary recognition of the divine majesty: "and from now on I praise the god" or, in Phrygian texts, the formula of warning quoted above.

The Nature of Oneness in Henotheistic Religion

Altogether our enquiry into the nature of henotheistic religiosity has revealed one central message: the god involved is superior, uniquely great, towering above other gods. The divine superiority manifests itself in two ways, first, as an unrestricted capacity to perform matchless miracles and creative acts—"to do anything (s)he wants" (so particularly in the aretalogies)—and secondly, as a status of absolute and autocratic authority over world and cosmos: "controlling everything that is." With this conclusion, we are ready to turn our attention from the themes of 'greatness' and 'superiority' to the more specific aspect

189. I follow here the argument of Pleket 1981, p. 180 and n. 135. On confession of sins in antiquity see the fundamental work of R. Pettazzoni, *La confessione dei peccati*, especially III, 2 (Bologna, 1936). The confession inscriptions in: Petzl 1994. Outside the Lydian-Phrygian inscriptions the practice of public confession is particularly prominent in the religion of the Egyptian gods and of the Dea Syria. See for example Ovid *Ex Ponto* 1, 1, 51ff., who states: *talia caelestes fieri praecoma gaudent ut sua quid valeant numina teste probent* ("The gods rejoice in such heraldings that witnesses may attest to their power"). This mentality is also apparent in Jewish literature. Afflicted by a horrible disease Antiochus IV promises that, if the God of the Jews will deliver him from his pains, he will visit every inhabited place to proclaim God's might (2 Maccabees 9:17).

of 'oneness' as most patently obvious in the acclamation *heis ho theos* ('one is the god'). As I mentioned earlier, it is easier to determine what the expression does not mean than exactly what it does. Everybody agrees that this type of oneness cannot be simply equated with monotheism (once more leaving aside the question of whether pure monotheism ever existed in any ancient civilization). As is immediately apparent from various hymnic texts where Isis may be accompanied by Sarapis, by Osiris and by many other gods, the deity who is acclaimed as *heis* is not (necessarily) *monos* in the sense of "the only god that exists." But by thus stating the problem, we already run the risk of distorting the Greek term *monos* by the imposition of our concept of 'monotheism'. In fact, the term *monos* is by no means absent from these praises and, indeed, we have already encountered it in an Isis aretalogy. What is more, it is a common term in hymnody in general and especially current in hymns for henotheistic gods. A glance at its functions will advance our insight into the connotations of its twin-term *heis*, which, being more restricted to an acclamative function, does not occur prominently in hymns. On the other hand Latin *unus* does, and, henotheism being a phenomenon that spread far and wide in the Roman empire, we shall from now on indiscriminately rely on both Latin and Greek material.

A quick perusal of a few aretalogies, hymns and other panegyric texts reveals that terms like *unus*, *solus*, *monos* may have two different functions,¹⁹⁰ although they cannot always be clearly distinguished. The first is the function apparent in such acclamations as: "you alone are able to do this (*tu sola potes*)," or "you alone have the power over a certain domain" (e.g., "Hail, Roma, ... to you alone, o most venerable, the Moirai have lended fame ...," or in the claim we have already

190. On this difference cf. Nock 1972 I, pp. 39f. and Nock-Festugière 1972 I, p. 57. Weinreich 1969 I, p. 434 also distinguishes between henotheistic and 'relative' functions.

met: "I, Isis, am the *one and only* sovereign of this era").¹⁹¹ In these formulas, which are among the most popular hymnic devices, those qualities of the revered god that make him *exceptional* are emphasized. (S)he is the only one who can do things that all others cannot or the only one who rules over the world—which does not imply that she is the only goddess. Likewise Hellenistic rulers could claim that they were the 'great' or the 'only' king, although they were perfectly aware of the irritating existence of plenty of colleagues around.

In this sense, Latin *solus* and Greek *monos* have a contrastive and relative force pertaining to quality, not an ontological exclusive or all-embracing one. As a translation, the term 'unique(ly)' comes closest. In the same sense the terms are also very frequent in relative formulas for famous mortals: generals, emperors, athletes, etc., both in Greece and Rome. This, then, seems to be the dominant meaning that both Latin *unus* or *solus* and Greek *heis* or *monos* have in the hundreds of acclamations and invocations, most emphatically in the *heis theos* cheers.¹⁹² One of the arguments for this specific meaning is that acclamations with *heis*, *monos* and *prôtos*, and various combinations of these terms, are specifically frequent in the agonistic sphere.¹⁹³ Very popular was *heis ap' aiônos* or *prôtos kai monos ap' aiônos*, which, according to Tertullian, *De spect.* 25, was the usual cheer at games and contests.¹⁹⁴

191. Lucretius 1, 31, and *Hymn of Melmo to Rome*. *Stob. Flor.* 1, p. 312 (H) respectively; cf. Norden 1923, p. 160.

192. Kl. Wengst, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums* (Diss., Bonn, 1967), pp. 128ff. gives the Christian evidence for *heis* and *monos* as indications of the singularity of God as god, and more especially, as creator. It is a "Terminus Technicus der frühchristlichen Heidenmission" and no doubt originated as an anti-acclamation against the pre-existent pagan *heis theos* acclamations. There is also a good, brief survey of the pagan evidence. However, even in the New Testament, the terms offer no warrant of a pure monotheism. See *supra* n. 136.

193. Collected and discussed by M. N. Tod, "Greek Record-keeping and Record-breaking," *CQ*, 43 (1949), pp. 105ff., esp. 111f.

194. This text has been amply discussed by L. Robert, *Études épigraphiques et philologiques* (Paris, 1938), pp. 108–11, who several times returns to these acclamations:

Most probably this means something like "the uniquely first since all eternity" or more colloquially: "we have never seen such a miraculous star." Similar acclamations existed in Latin.¹⁹⁵

Less obvious is the intended meaning of the notoriously enigmatic bi-, tri-, and quadripartite acclamations (all from the second and third centuries CE), such as: *heis Zeus Serapis*, or *heis Zeus Serapis Asklepios Soter*, or *heis Zeus Mitras Helios*. And there are more elaborated formulas as well. Peterson has made a thorough investigation of the entire complex. He postulates a Chaldaean astrological origin, which came into its own in later solar theology.¹⁹⁶ Supporting his argument with an abundance of data,¹⁹⁷ Peterson argues that these are *not* syncretistic confessions expressing the unity or identity of the gods mentioned. On the contrary, he claims, they are acclamations emphasizing the exceptional character and the greatness of the god or gods invoked. In other words, just like single *heis theos*, they represent the relative, not the unifying force of the word *heis*.¹⁹⁸ On the other hand, it is hard to avoid

Hellenica, X, p. 61; XIII, p. 216; "Les épigrammes satiriques de Lucillus sur les athlètes: parodie et réalités," in: *L'épigramme grecque* (Entretiens Hardt, XIV [Geneva, 1967]), p. 275f.

195. S. Mrozek, "Primus omnium sur les inscriptions des municipes italiens," *Epigraphica*, 33 (1971), pp. 60–69, discusses some Latin expressions, without realizing, or so it seems, that they go back to Hellenistic Greek prototypes. Cf. *sui temporis primus et solus factionarius* in an inscription from 275 CE. (*CIL* VI, 10060). Martial 8, 66, 6, has: *renum prima salus et una, Caesar*.

196. Peterson 1926, pp. 227–56. See most recently: W. Fauth, *Helios Megistos. Zur synkretistischen Theologie der Spätantike* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 74–77.

197. For instance a graffito adduced by Peterson, p. 230: "one is Zeus Sarapis, great is Isis the Lady" (*heis Zeus Sarapis; megalê Isis hê kuria*), which suffices to show how the term *heis* defies any narrow monolithic 'translation'. "Es geht hier nicht um eine begriffliche Definition, sondern um eine Hoheitsaussage" (p. 132).

198. L. Robert, *Opera minora selecta* (Amsterdam, 1969) I, p. 427, n. 101, in this connection speaks of "le caractère de superlatif de l'acclamation *heis theos*." With Peterson he contests Cumont's interpretation 'dieu unique'. It is rather 'dieu suprême', and there is an "équivalence pratique entre *heis* et *meGas*." As opposed to the French 'unique', the English 'unique', like the Dutch 'enig', combines the two notions that can be distinguished as the superlative and the 'exclusive'. The same is

the impression that with the extension of the formula to several names of gods the unifying-henotheistic element gradually increased at the cost of the acclamatory-elative component. After all, the various gods mentioned in these formulas did undergo a rapid and profound process of syncretism in late antiquity. However, the difference is not always easy to trace and perhaps it is not such a good idea to expect—and hence search for—precise semantic distinctions.

In this connection we should bear in mind that acclamations typically belong to what in sociolinguistics is called 'phatic or expressive language', a form of communication that, in opposition to descriptive expression, does not normally bear a precise and well-defined meaning. What did Israelites and Greeks and Romans mean when they wished that their kings and emperors 'may live for ever (or in eternity)', or what the Chinese, with their slogan—hardly the offspring of a Mediterranean tradition—'May Chairman Mao live for ever'?¹⁹⁹ The fact that *heis* may refer either to hierarchy ('the first', 'unique') or to ontology ('the only one that *is*' or 'the one that is all') makes the term eminently liable to manipulation and ambiguous application. We should at least consider the possibility that these cheers did not have any precise 'intended meaning' at all, but expressed only a vague notion of magnification. It is only when the shouter comes to reflect on what he

true of the Latin *unicus*. E. Dutoit, 'Unicus', 'unice' chez Tite-Live, *Latomus*, 15 (1956), pp. 481–88, counts 25 cases in Livy out of which 8 have the sense 'only' (with the exception of others) and 17, 'without equal', 'unmatched'. This may create ambiguities: for instance in Hor. *C.* 3, 14, 5 *unice gaudens mulier marito*: "Ob *unicus maritus* 'der einzige Gatte' oder 'der einzigartige Gatte' heisst ist eine alte Streitfrage" (J. W. Scholz, *HS*, 5 [1971], p. 133, n. 34 a, with reference to Catull. 73, 6; *qui me unum atque unicum amicum habuit*). That even the Greek expression *heis kai monos* ('one and only') does not exclude the existence of other gods is curiously illustrated by an inscription from Lydia (*EAM* V, 1, no. 246) mentioning a "priest of the One and Only God and of Hosios kai Dikaios." The elative function of *heis kai monos* is also demonstrated by the fact that the expression also denotes exceptional human beings: P. Herrmann and K. Z. Polatkan, "Das Testament des Epikrates," *SbWien*, Phil.-hist. Kl., 265 (1969), p. 53 with n. 113.

199. On these expressions and further literature: *TER UNUS*, pp. 204f.

is shouting—but how many ever did (or do)?—that the construction of distinct (and divergent) meanings can commence.

This brings us to the second of the two different functions announced above. An inscription from Capua hails Isis as: *te tibi una quae es omnia* ('you who alone art all').²⁰⁰ If we translate Latin *unus/una* into its Greek equivalent *heis/mia*, this expression closely resembles the one introduced by Xenophanes as discussed in our first section, and even more its later offspring in the all-embracing Stoic and Neo-Platonic claims that their god was 'one and all' (Gr. *hen kai pan*, Lat. *solus omnia*). But if we now ask if this similarity implies equality, the answer must be negative, at least for the henotheistic theology of the earlier Hellenistic period. For "one and all" here appears to have a very special frame of reference, as expressed in an exemplary way in a hymn of Isidorus 1.23 where it is said: "that you alone (*monē*) are all other goddesses who are named by the nations."

This is as close as Hellenistic henotheism ever got to monotheism. Isis is here represented as alone embodying all the other goddesses. Further elaborations include long geographical lists of all the superior gods of each region who are there invoked by their local names, but who are now unmasked as just another representation of the one and only henotheistic god.²⁰¹ This is a typical product of theological reflection. However, that theological reflection is not always the most reliable refuge in religious matters becomes apparent from the inevitable limitations inherent in this particular trope. First, henotheism is fatally gender-specific: the many different representations of Isis are inevitably all female. This irritating obstacle on the road to real mono-

200. *CIL*, X, 3800 = *ILS* 4362 = *SIRIS* 502. Cf. V. Tran Tam Tinh, *Le culte de divinités orientales en Campanie* (Leiden, 1972), p. 77 and pp. 199–234; Grandjean 1975, pp. 69ff.

201. Hence her inclusive Greek epithet 'Myrionyma' ('with innumerable names') is so stereotyped that it occurs both in literary texts (for instance in the *Life of Aesop* 5 = Totti 1985, no. 18) and even in Latin inscriptions (*CIL* III, 882 and 4017 = *SIRIS* 656; *CIL* V, 5080; *CIL* XIII, 3461 = *ILS* 4376a = *SIRIS* 749). Turcan 1989 entitles his chapter on the goddess: 'Isis Myrionyme'.

theism is revealingly illustrated by the creative solution contrived by a hymnodist who could not choose between Isis and Sarapis: "You are *two*, but you are called *many* among the nations. In fact, life knows you *alone* (*monous*) as gods."²⁰² Furthermore, this construction by no means implies that all lesser gods are ousted by this syncretistic operation. It is only the great national goddesses that are identified with Isis. Apparently the message is: Isis is the greatest goddess; consequently every other *great* goddess can only be an alias of this central deity.

Questions of Origin

Much of what has been demonstrated in this section is strongly reminiscent of creeds and cultic practices of Egypt and the ancient Near East. Time and again characteristic elements of aretologies could be traced back to non-Greek models,²⁰³ and there is not one of the nine characteristics listed above that could not readily be typified as a structural phenomenon of Near Eastern religiosity rather than of classical Greek religion. Accordingly, most of them do not come well into view before the Hellenistic era, to reach their bloom only in Imperial times, especially in the second to third centuries CE. The same is true for the acclamation *heis*. There is only one pre-hellenistic attestation of this acclamation, viz. in a Gurob papyrus²⁰⁴ that has preserved a fragment

202. Hymn of Maronea ll. 19–20.

203. Not only Egyptian ones: A. Jeremias, *Monotheistische Strömungen innerhalb der babylonischen Religion* (Leipzig, 1904), W. von Soden in: *Sumerische und Akkadische Hymnen und Gebete* (Zürich, 1953), esp. pp. 50, 254, 258f., 301f., and 395f., and B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses* (Bethesda, Maryland, 1996), pp. 608; 619; 598; 699–701; and 704–6, mention several Mesopotamian hymns with "all gods in one" and other monotheizing characteristics. See also: B. Hartmann, "Monotheistische Strömungen in der Babylonischen Götterdienst," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 20 (1965–66), pp. 328–38. See especially the contributions of Barbara Porter and Simo Parpola in this volume.

204. *P. Gurob 1, 23*; O. Kern, *Orphicorum Fragmenta* (Berlin, 1922), p. 31; R. A. Pack, *The Greek and Latin Literary Texts from Greco-Roman Egypt* (1965), p. 2464. For recent discussion: S. Iles Johnston and T. J. Mc. Niven, "Dionysus and the Underworld in Toledo," *MH*, 53 (1996), pp. 25–36.

of what may have been an Orphic book. It contains an invocation of the *Kouretes* and the password: *heis Dionusos*.²⁰⁵ The papyrus is from the third century BCE, but the text itself should be attributed to the fourth century at least. So, as far as we can see, Dionysos was the first god to be hailed with an acclamation that became the most characteristic identification of the great gods of later times. The problem, however, is that we have no idea about the cultural identity of the acclamation. Did it originate in Greece or with a local cult group in Egypt, influenced by Egyptian conceptions? In this context it may be of interest that the first time that we see the acclamation addressed to a human—albeit semi-deified—person is in the acclamation "one like Pythios (Apollo)," addressed to the emperor Nero (Cass. Dio 61. 20, 5; cf. 63. 20, 5). Did Nero's special Alexandrian 'claqueurs' (Suet. *Nero* 20) introduce this agonistic acclamation from Egypt?

The term *heis* as an elative praise is not attested in classical Greece, but *monos* and *prôtos kai monos* were so ubiquitous that they are cherished material for puns in Attic comedy and elsewhere.²⁰⁶ Altogether, I consider it most likely that the acclamation *heis* originated as a translation of the Egyptian word for 'one' and that there was a cross-fertilization with an ideology that was already *in statu nascendi* elsewhere in the Hellenistic Mediterranean. The expressions we have seen earlier—Isis as *tên mian* ('the one'), or as "you who alone (*mounê*) are all other goddesses who are named by the nations," while Apuleius *Metam.* 11.4 speaks of her *nomen unicum*—may well betray the Egyptian Isis-name Thiousis, 'the one'.²⁰⁷ However, all this does not alter the fact that it is easier, more rewarding and more relevant to draw a list of characteristics of henotheistic religiosity, as we have done, than to precisely

205. That it is a password may be inferred from the words immediately following the acclamation: *heis Dionusos sumbola*.

206. Testimonia in *TER UNUS*, p. 248.

207. Vanderlip 1972, p. 31; Grandjean 1975, p. 70f.; Gwyn Griffiths 1975, p. 145. On the general diffusion of this expression among Egyptian and Near Eastern civilizations: C. H. Gordon, "His Name is 'One'," *JNES*, 29 (1970), pp. 198ff.

analyze and describe what exactly *heis* is supposed to mean. In fact, the only way to discover the meaning, or rather the connotations, of the word *heis* is by adducing the above collection of henotheistic features.

Concluding Remarks

What, then, is the overall message of our source material? This: that the lauded god is greater, more powerful than, hence absolutely superior to all other gods. In fact, henotheistic deities are *competing for omnipotence*. In this (and many other respects), they have adopted traits of Hellenistic kingship, and accordingly they manifest themselves as autocratic rulers to whom a mortal could only respond with an attitude of humble subservience or even slavery. This went hand in hand with the appearance of new forms of a more intense and personal relationship between god and man, sometimes accompanied by experiences and expressions of sin, guilt, confession and mercy. In this context in particular we encounter claims that the god is 'great', indeed greater than other gods. (S)he is 'unique' and outshines all other deities by her/his greatness.

Though most of the elements analyzed above can already be found sporadically in earlier periods, their amalgamation into one structural complex is specifically characteristic of the religious mentality that we are now discussing. Hymns, including those of the archaic and classical periods of Greece, are praises of a god. By definition they concentrate on one particular deity and magnify his greatness. Hence we have called them henotheistic moments in an otherwise polytheistic context. However, henotheism never developed into a structural religious, let alone cultic, phenomenon before the Hellenistic period. Mythically speaking, Zeus was superior to all other Greek gods, as is most emphatically expressed in a unique aretalogical formula of omnipotence at the beginning of Hesiod's *Works and Days*.²⁰⁸ However, this had no cultic consequences whatever. In classical times, outside the sphere of philo-

208. West *ad loc.*: "reminiscent of ... Semitic and Egyptian poetry."

sophical monotheism.²⁰⁹ a permanent exclusive devotion to one god was confined to deviant religious bigots on the margin of society. The dogmatic elevation of one god above all others and the concomitant affective exclusion of other gods are features typical of Hellenistic and later religiosity.²¹⁰ All this is expressed in the acclamation *heis (ho) theos*.

CONCLUSION

Three experiments in oneness. The first two represent cosmologies 'to live by'²¹¹ and can be understood as explanatory devices, an individual one to explain why things are as they are, and a collective one to help imagine the mechanisms that make things happen as they happen. These 'One Gods', being products of intellectual reflection, are more or less abstract principles that transcend both men *and* traditional gods. They establish a conceptual unity, but a unity that is not the sum of the plurality of the normal gods. In both experiments, the One and the Many operate on different levels and have different tasks, preserving a complementary co-existence. After all, insight into the divine *arche* of the cosmos or into the supernatural strand of causation does *not* neutral-

209. C. Ramnoux, "Sur un monothéisme grec," *RPhL*, 82 (1984), pp. 175-98.

210. Of course, Nock 1933, is right in making a distinction between monotheistic conversion (which implies the "reorientation of the soul and the consciousness that the old was wrong and the new is right" [p. 7]) and polytheistic "adhesion." However, the fact that henotheism has also been called 'affective monotheism' implies that in the mind of the believer, for a shorter or longer period of time, one god dominates his consciousness. Expressions of genuine monotheism are extremely rare in pagan texts. Of the objectionable baker's wife in *Apul. Met.* 9, 14, it is said: "a despiser of all gods whom others did honour, one that affirmed that she had instead of our sure religion an only god by herself" (*spretis atque calcatis nummibus in vicem certae religionis mentita sacrilega praesumptione dei quem praedicaret unicui*). But it is very likely that this includes a contemptuous allusion to the Christian or Jewish belief in one god: L. Herrmann, "L'Ane d'or et le christianisme," *Latomus*, 12 (1953), pp. 188-91. M. Simon, "Apulée et le christianisme," in: *Mélanges d'histoire des religions offerts à H.-Ch. Puech* (Paris, 1974), pp. 299-305, even argues that Apuleius may have been inspired by the Pauline epistles. Cf. Gwyn Griffiths 1975, p. 359.

211. Geertz 1973, p. 118.

ize human anxiety and concern, nor reduce the desire to positively influence and control the future. To *explain* the inexorable, divinity must be depersonalized: the One god is nameless and is not conceived as an approachable personal authority, hence is neither worshipped nor invoked through prayer. The traditional personal gods, on the other hand, derive their very identity from their cultic existence, including sacrifice and prayer, and from iconography and myth. Though belonging to the same polythetic class of 'gods', the One and the Many are separate categories. In this respect they are incomparable, hence do not compete.

In contradistinction, the third experiment concerns One god who shares *all* characteristics with the traditional gods, including name, cult and myth. In fact (s)he *is* a traditional god, but one who has risen to such sublime eminence that (s)he becomes different. The difference between this One and the Many, however, is not one of quality, but of status. Not being the product of intellectual reflection, the One god is the focus of appeal and supplication. In order to *mollify* the inexorable, it must be personalized. Accordingly, the Hellenistic One God is personal and very much a projection of a social/political reality: the king. The human worshipper is, first and foremost, dependent, dependence being another manner of creating sense out of chaos.²¹² In this conception all gods belong to one and the same category. Not only are they comparable, they *are* continuously *being* compared and constantly involved in a competition for pride of place. Instead of One as opposed to the Many, there are several competing Ones among the Many.

The syncretistic identification of the Many (albeit only of the greatest among them) with the One is the ultimate venture in the Hellenistic quest for unity in diversity. None of the three Ones ousted or absorbed the Many. The first two, being so different, had no need to endeavour

212. Burkert 1996, p. 84, quoting D. Morris, *The Naked Ape: A Zoologist's Study of the Human Animal* (New York, 1967), p. 180: "fundamental biological tendency ... to submit ourselves to an all-powerful, dominant member of the group."

to, the third One, though not averse, did not succeed. One may well wonder if any god ever succeeds. The above analysis is an attempt at historical interpretation, not a dogmatic treatise. The three experiments are not impenetrable isolated systems, and—especially in religion—borders are there to be crossed. One may try to personalize the anonymous First Principle by calling it Zeus, as we have seen. Tyche experienced a similar manipulation. As the fearsome impersonal principle of arbitrariness, she was "overcome" by Isis, as the powerful personified protector of good Fortune, she was identified with the Egyptian goddess. Tyche never lost her ambiguous position on the brink between principle and person. In late antiquity, God and Christ were worshipped in hymns that extolled their qualities to such a degree that these Ones risked being reduced to a "Denk-, Seh-, Hör-, und Intelligenzmonstrum," as Feyerabend characterized the Xenophanean god. It is as if these 'experiments with experiments' go just one bridge too far by trying to unite what is basically incompatible. Ask our colleagues in the Department of Philosophy of Religion: they live on this *aporia*. But do not ask the author of this paper, because it is not his subject.

According to N. Luhmann²¹³ one of the major functions of religion is the "reduction of complexity" as a strategy for creating sense out of the interactions of a system with its environment. This may well be true. However, many sociologists of religion no less than specialists of Greek religion²¹⁴ seem to share the conviction that pre-modern societies structurally share a penchant for an all-encompassing unity of meaning²¹⁵ and tend to deny premodern religions the pluralism that,

213. *The Function of Religion* (Frankfurt 1977).

214. Above n. 12. Not only *modern* specialists: Aristotle *Met.* 586a, cites a list of opposites (*sustocheia*) that was normative in a certain branch of Pythagoreism, which are all in the opposition positive-negative: unlimited-limited, even-odd, *plurality-one*, left-right, female-male, in motion-at rest, crooked-straight, darkness-light, evil-good, oblong-square.

215. K.-W. Dahm and V. Hörner, "Religiöse Sinndeutung und gesellschaftliche Komplexität," in: R. Volp, ed., *Chancen der Religion* (Gütersloh, 1978), p. 81: "eine Tendenz zu einer alle Lebenszüge umfassenden Sinntotalität."

on the face of it, is so characteristic of polytheism,²¹⁶ I hope to have shown that this idea needs some qualification.

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216. Discussion and criticism of this modern judgment by Gladigow 1990, pp. 250f., who rightly contests P. L. Berger's assertion: "Modernität schafft eine neue Situation, in der Ausschauen und Auswählen zum Imperativ wird," on the ground that it "klammert den 'Normalfall' eines polytheistischen Systems aus und konstruiert monistische Entwürfe als verbindliche Form."

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ABBREVIATIONS

- ANRW *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase, Berlin 1972-)
- BE *Bulletin épigraphique* (annually in *Revue des études grecques*)
- CIL *Corpus inscriptionum latinarum* (1863-)
- D-K H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin 1951⁰)
- ERE *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (1908-21)
- GGR M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion I-II* (Munich 1967³-61²)
- HwG *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* (ed. H. Cancik *et alii*, 1988)
- IG *Inscriptiones graecae* (1873-)
- ILS *Inscriptiones Latinae selectae I-III* (ed. H. Dessau, Berlin 1892-1916)
- KRS G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge 1983²)
- PGM *Papyri graecae magicae I-II* (ed. K. Preisendanz *et alii*, Stuttgart 1973-74)
- P.Oxy *The Oxyrynchus Papyri* (London 1898-)
- RAC *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (ed. Th. Klauser *et alii*, Stuttgart 1950-)
- RE *Pauly's Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaften* (Stuttgart-Munich 1893-)
- RGG *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (1957-65³)
- SEG *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* (1923-71, New Series, ed. H. W. Pleket *et alii*, Amsterdam 1976-)
- SIRIS *Sylloge Inscriptionum Religionis Isiacae et Sarapiacae* (ed. L. Vidman, Berlin 1969)
- Suppl. Mag. *Supplementum Magicum I-II* (ed. R. W. Daniel and F. Maltomini Opladen 1990-92)
- Syll. *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum I-IV* (ed. W. Dittenberger *et alii*, Leipzig 1915-24³)
- TAM *Tituli Asiae Minoris* (Vienna 1901-)
- TER H. S. Versnel, *TER UNUS. Isis, Dionysos and Hermes: Three Studies in UNUS Henotheism* (Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion I, Leiden 1990)
- TWNT *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (ed. R. Kittel *et alii*, Stuttgart 1933-79)

ABBREVIATIONS OF PERIODICALS

- AJPh *American Journal of Philology*
- ARW *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*
- BaBesch *Bulletin Antieke Beschaving*
- BICS *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London*
- BJ *Bonner Jahrbücher*
- BZ *Biblische Zeitschrift*
- CJ *The Classical Journal*
- ClAnt *Classical Antiquity*
- CPh *Classical Philology*
- CQ *Classical Quarterly*
- CR *Classical Review*
- GRBS *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*
- HSPH *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*
- HThR *Harvard Theological Review*
- JbAC *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*
- JEA *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
- JIES *Journal of Indo-European Studies*
- JNES *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
- JWI *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*
- MH *Museum Helveticum*
- PAPHS *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*
- RhM *Rheinisches Museum*
- RPhL *Revue philosophique de Louvain*
- RThPh *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*
- TAPhA *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*
- WS *Wiener Studien*
- YCIS *Yale Classical Studies*
- ZPE *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*