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Mortal and Divine in Xenophanes’ Epistemology*

Abstract: In the first instance, this paper offers a new interpretation of the logic of Xenophanes B18.1. Contrary to the two ways in which previous commentators have construed this line, Xenophanes neither categorically rejects the notion of divine disclosure nor acquiesces in traditional understandings of it. Rather, Xenophanes rejects traditional conceptions of divine disclosure as theologically faulty and supplants them with his own, alternative notion of disclosure. Having argued that Xenophanes developed a conception of divine disclosure, I advance further suggestions concerning its function and characteristics. I follow and develop Lesher’s (1983) argument that Xenophanes arrives at his understanding of the limitations of human knowledge by rejecting traditional divinatory assumptions. But Lesher, I suggest, tells only half the story. On Xenophanes’ conception of disclosure, the divine purposively facilitates mortal belief-formation and mortal inquiry. That is, Xenophanes’ own understanding of disclosure underlies his positive views regarding what does lie within the scope of mortal epistemology. More speculatively, I develop two alternative interpretations of the precise notion of purposiveness which underlies Xenophanean disclosure. Most probably, Xenophanes reconceptualises the notion of divine disclosure radically as the view that the divine purposively facilitates all mortal experience and belief-formation as part of its intelligent direction of the cosmos and its inhabitants. Another, somewhat less likely possibility is that Xenophanes maintains less idiosyncratically that the divine guides particular mortals in particular circumstances. Finally, I ask how the proposed interpretation of Xenophanes’ epistemology may lend nuance to our understanding of the complexity of his critical engagement with the traditional mantic model of divine disclosure.

Keywords: Xenophanes B18, epistemology, divine disclosure, divination, philosophy and religion

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* I am very grateful for the helpful comments which I received from the audience at the symposium. I am especially indebted to all those who kindly read and commented on earlier drafts of this paper: Malcolm Schofield, Robert Wardy, David Sedley, Gábor Betegh, James Warren, Geoffrey Lloyd, Catherine Rowett, James Lesher, Patricia Curd, Harvey Lederman and István Bodnár.
In any attempt to reflect on the relation between philosophy and religion in early Greek thought, and to assess the viability and implications of ‘philosophy’ and ‘religion’ as hermeneutic categories for that period, Xenophanes’ famous and famously controversial B18 will prove pivotal:

οὔτοι ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς πάντα θεοὶ θνητοῖς ὑπέδειξαν,
ἀλλὰ χρόνῳ ζητοῦντες ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἄμεινον.

Indeed not from the beginning did gods intimate all things to mortals, but as they search in time they discover better.¹

In the first instance, what follows offers a new interpretation of the logic of B18.1. We may distinguish two ways in which the statement has been construed. According to the first, majority reading, (i) Xenophanes denies that the gods ever ὑπέδειξαν anything to mortals and (ii) this denial is tantamount to a categorical rejection of divine disclosure. (ii) is affirmed both by the other proponents of the majority reading, who do not pause on the prefix ὑπό (rendering ὑπέδειξαν simply as ‘revealed’ or ‘disclosed’), and by Lesher, who does pause on it (rendering ‘intimated’).² On the second, minority reading, again treating ὑποδείκνυμι simply as an unexceptional term for disclosure, when Xenophanes denies that the gods revealed (ὑπέδειξαν) all things from the outset he implies, or at least allows, that they did reveal (ὑπέδειξαν) some things at some times.³ It is universally held, then, that we can only attribute a notion of divine disclosure to Xenophanes if we maintain that the temporal and extensional markers, ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς and πάντα, imply or permit that the gods did ὑπέδειξαν some things at some times.⁴

This set-up is misleading in failing to recognise that, in addition to the aforementioned temporal and extensional qualifications, Xenophanes also qualifies the manner in which, according to the view he rejects, the gods disclose things (ὑπέδειξαν). These qualifications, I will argue, do not restrict a rejection of divine disclosure as such. Rather, they combine to express a particular notion of divine disclosure, which Xenophanes rejects. That is, Xenophanes argues that the gods never disclosed anything in the manner in which the view negated in B18.1 conceives of disclosure. A consideration of these points, and of B36, will suggest that

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¹ Adopting Lesher’s rendering, (1992), p. 27. I will presently discuss ὑπέδειξαν in detail.
⁴ N.B. Lesher’s exposition of the views that have been and can be taken, (1991), p. 230.
Xenophanes neither allows that the gods did intimate (ὑπέδειξαν) some things at some times (following tenet (i) of the majority reading against the minority reading) nor denies divine disclosure categorically (contrary to tenet (ii) of the majority reading). Rather, he rejects specifically what he takes to be the traditional view, that from the beginning the gods intimated (ὑπέδειξαν) everything, as a theologically faulty conception of the nature of divine disclosure, and supplants that conception with his own, alternative notion of disclosure.

Having argued that Xenophanes developed a conception of divine disclosure, I will offer some further suggestions concerning its function and characteristics. Xenophanean disclosure, I will argue, is pointedly demarcated from poetic inspiration and mantic communication and is not such as to enable mortals to procure certain knowledge. Here I follow Lesher’s (1983) convincing and neglected argument that Xenophanes arrives at the negative aspects of his epistemology, his scepticism,⁵ by rejecting traditional divinatory assumptions (B34). But Lesher, I believe, tells only half the story. On Xenophanes’ alternative model of disclosure, I will argue, the divine purposively facilitates mortal belief-formation and mortal inquiry. Xenophanes’ own model of disclosure, in other words, underlies his positive views regarding what does lie within the scope of mortal epistemology. More speculatively, I develop two alternative interpretations of the precise notion of purposiveness which underlies Xenophanean disclosure. Most probably, Xenophanes reconceptualises the notion of divine disclosure radically as the view that the divine purposively facilitates all mortal experience and belief-formation as part of its intelligent direction of the cosmos and its inhabitants. Another, somewhat less likely, possibility is that Xenophanes maintains less idiosyncratically that the divine guides particular mortals in particular circumstances.

Cicero speaks of Xenophanes as the only one among the most ancient philosophers who, while asserting the existence of the gods, did away with divination from its very foundation: diuinationem funditus sustulit (De div. I.3.5, A52).⁶ Lesher

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⁶ Cf. Aëtius: Ξενοφάνης καὶ Ἐπίκουρος ἀναιροῦσι τὴν μαντικήν. (V.1.2 = A52). Since Cicero’s diuinationem translates the Greek μαντική (De div. I.1.1), and given both the parallelism of sustulit and ἀναιροῦσι, and the recurrent association of Xenophanes and Epicurus, we may assume that Cicero and Aëtius draw on a common source. The two passages give parallel accounts also of the Stoic (V.1.3; De div. I.3.6) and Peripatetic (V.1.4; De div. I.3.5) views. It is impossible to determine whether their common source drew on some lost lines (the extant fragments contain no cognate of the word μαντική) or perhaps pounced on B18 itself in his doxographic eagerness to identify a straightforward rejection of divination which could be opposed (as in Cicero De div. I.3.5f and Diels’ Aëtius V.1) to its otherwise universal acceptance.
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(1992), who notes several times his acceptance of A52 as a faithful report, cites favourably Dodds’ evaluation of the implications of such acceptance: “If this is true, it means that, almost alone among classical Greek thinkers, he [Xenophanes] swept aside not only the pseudo-science of reading omens but the whole deep-seated complex of ideas about inspiration.”⁷ Both earlier and later commentators on Xenophanes’ relation to traditional theology similarly echo Cicero’s talk of a traceless rejection.⁸ Indeed, most modern scholars were all too happy to inherit a Xenophanes who champions independent mortal inquiry against revelation.⁹ Although I will agree that Xenophanes indeed repudiated divination, I will ask, finally, how my interpretation of his epistemology may lend nuance to our understanding of the complexity of his engagement with the culturally and theologically dominant mantic model of divine disclosure.

* In epic poetry, δείκνυμι can signify divine disclosure, but never with the prefix ὑπό.¹⁰ In archaic and classical Greek, ὑποδείκνυμι only very rarely describes divine actions towards mortals; its signification of a notion of divine disclosure to mortals in Xenophanes (θεοὶ θνητοῖς ὑπέδειξαν) is, to my knowledge, unique in these periods. Lesher thus rightly emphasises the prefix in ὑπέδειξαν, which, he argues, indicates an indirect, cryptic and possibly underhand kind of disclosure. Lesher also, however, misleadingly downplays the peculiarity and distinctiveness of Xenophanes’ terminology.¹¹ He argues (1991) that a passage in Xenophon (Mem. IV.3.13) suggests that the usage of ὑποδείκνυμι in the context of divine relationship with mortals was entirely appropriate and cites (1992) the same passage as a parallel usage of the verb to express divine communication.¹² A closer

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8 E.g. “a clean sweep of all the elements of popular belief which were hostile to his higher standard” (Gomperz 1906, p. 163), “Xenophanes schaltet die Götter im Einklang mit seiner Theologie völlig aus” (Kleingünther 1933, p. 41), “the entire framework ... is here swept away” (Hussey 1990, p. 19), cf. Schrödinger (“clear away”, Schrödinger 1954, p. 68); on divination: “par la base” (Bouché-Leclercq 1879–1882, p. 33); “altogether” (Flower 2008, p. 8) (my emphases).
9 Tellingly, Loenen (1956) styles Xenophanes an “enlightened critic” when defending the majority reading of B18.1 (p. 136; cf. Gomperz 1906, p. 163; Dodds 1973, pp. 4f), while Shorey (1911), arguing for the minority reading, speculates that scholars have been “misled by ... partiality for the pre-Socratics” (p. 89); more recently, cf. Lesher (2008), pp. 468f; Curd (2002), pp. 120–129.
10 II. XIII.243f; Od. III.173f; cf. Op. 448–451; Pind. fr.131b M; also, Hdt. I.209; VII.37 (npo-).
12 Lesher (1991), p. 238. As parallels for B18.1, Lesher (1992, p. 153) lists passages in which he says the operative verb for divine communication is δείκνυμι or one of its compounds (with ὑπό
look at the context, however, reveals that divine disclosure is not at issue here. Rather, the gods imply indirectly (ὑποδείκνυοντα) a certain precept about proper worship (that mortals should honour them even though they cannot see them) simply through the discreet manner in which they benefit mortals without revealing themselves openly.¹³ Herodotus, offering another rare and similarly pointed use of ὑποδείκνυοντα to describe the behaviour of the divine towards mortals, writes that god gives many mortals a show of blessedness (πολλοῖσι ... ὑποδέξας ὀλβον ὁ θεός), before ruining them utterly (I.32). The passage demonstrates the sinister undertones of the verb, but it is clear from context that the ‘showing’ in question consists simply in the mortal’s happiness prior to calamity and is unrelated to anything like divine communication.

Though neither passage offers a straightforward parallel, Xenophon supports Lesher’s identification of the notion of indirectness in ὑπέδειξαν, while Herodotus shows that the verb can naturally connote suspicion or even criticism in descriptions of divine behaviour.¹⁴ Though not invariably, such connotations, as well as those of cryptic secretiveness, regularly characterise the prefix and other occurrences of the compound.¹⁵ More generally, both Herodotus and Xenophon use ὑποδείκνυοντα in a pointed way in their descriptions of divine behaviour. They do not use the verb as a mere synonym for δείκνυοντα.

Crucially, the terminological novelty of ὑπεδείξαν notwithstanding, Xenophanes does employ this exceptional vocabulary to signify a notion of divine disclosure. The issue at stake is how mortals come to discover what they discover. Xenophanes regards the kind of divine intimation which he rejects as mutually exclusive with his prescription of temporally protracted inquiries. Whatever else, such inquiries clearly extend for Xenophanes to the business of forming and assessing beliefs. Thus, for example, Xenophanes’ observations (whether first-hand or not) about marine fossils found inland support his novel theory of the earth’s sub-

or πρό). Other than Xen. Mem. IV.3.13, however, ὑποδείκνυοντα occurs in none of the other passages listed by Lesher (I could not find any form of δείκνυοντα in Hes. Op. 825–828; h.Hom. 32.13; h.Hom. 33.14–16; h.Hom. 4.525ff; Pind. Paean 9; Thuc. VII.50).

¹³ The benefits in question extend to providential actions quite generally (τἀγαθὰ διδόντες), and cannot be restricted to divine disclosure, which is referred to earlier with unexceptional vocabulary as one instance of such benefits (διὰ μαντικῆς ... φράζοντας, Mem. IV.3.12).

¹⁴ Cf. ‘feigning virtue’, Thuc. IV.86.5.

¹⁵ LSJ, sv. ὑπό, F, III; Smyth (1972), p. 388; cf. e.g. Il. XXI.44. In a scholion on Lycoph. 344, ψηφικῶν ὑποδείχαν signifies Simon’s secret disclosure of a signal to the Greeks (Lesher 1992, p. 153). In literary criticism, again, ὑποδείκνυοντα came to signify that an inexplicit poetic text indirectly implies certain distinctions or insights (Plut. Mor. 23ε; 645α5) or even elaborate philosophical doctrines (e.g. ps.-Plut. de Hom.2 1063–1070, 1298–1308 Kindstrand).
mersion (A33, 32) and, perhaps, its preferability to Anaximander’s theory of desic-
cation (DK12 A27).¹⁶ Correspondingly, B18.1 must articulate a notion of disclosure
which, whatever else, purports to offer an instant access to truths, which conflicts
with the call to search for them through such temporally protracted inquiries.¹⁷

The negated view conceives of disclosure as an indirect, secretive and cryptic
affair. Furthermore, in this manner the gods disclosed everything (πάντα) from
the beginning (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς). Given Xenophanes’ qualification of the manner of dis-
closure, ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς and πάντα do not restrict a rejection of disclosure simpliciter,
but further qualify the notion of indirect, cryptic disclosure which Xenophanes
rejects. That is, Xenophanes does not reject severally the isolated claims that the
gods disclosed (i) from the beginning, (ii) everything and (iii) cryptically. Rather,
the qualifications (i)–(iii) combine to express a unified view of how disclosure
works, i.e. the view that from the beginning gods cryptically disclosed every-
thing, which Xenophanes rejects.

Lesher identifies omen-divination as the target of Xenophanes’ attack, which
he extends to a general rejection of the postulation of divine communication.¹⁸
We need not identify the notion of divine disclosure negated in B18.1 with omen-
divination or divination generally. Elsewhere too, however, Xenophanes’ theo-
logical criticisms (as in B14) confront pervasive and authoritative traditional sup-
positions and it is very likely that B18.1 conveys, inter alia, a polemical attitude
to this most dominant form of divine disclosure. Furthermore, the connotation
in ὑπέδειξαν of indirect, cryptic disclosure is highly apposite as a critical repre-
sentation of mantic communication. Omens, such as birds and lightning, com-
municated propositions indirectly and cryptically, and Greek tradition abounds
with the didactic tragedies of consultants who failed to realise that oracles too
are to be decoded and do not signify propositions in a direct and straightforward
manner.¹⁹ The term πάντα (B18.1) is also instructive. πάντα is here unqualified
and open-ended. The force of ‘all things’ or ‘everything’ in Xenophanes is else-
where context-sensitive. At different junctures, πάντα may refer to all things (B27,

¹⁷ As Montiglio shows, the Odyssean conception of the expansion of learning and wisdom
through wandering became a central methodological tenet among proponents of Ionian historiê,
(2000), pp. 88–90; (2005), pp. 100f, pp. 123–146. Lesher’s reading of ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἄμεινον as
highlights a likely connotation, but it seems implausible to exclude a corresponding notion of
improved results.
¹⁹ Epaminondas, for one, was warned to avoid the sea and met his end in a wood called Πέλα-
gος, Parke and Wormell (1956), no.258. I revert to this feature of divination below.
if authentic) or all members of a subset of things (B29) which undergo natural processes, to everything (or perhaps every sort of thing) censured among mortals (B11.1²⁰) and to every item in a foregoing catalogue of public honours (B2.10).²¹

The gods’ disclosure of ‘everything’ to mortals could certainly encompass such divinely inspired accounts of the world which are universal in scope as Hesiod’s _Theogony_.²² But the indirect, cryptic disclosure of ‘everything’, and especially the emphatic contrast with inquiries over time, again point also to a preoccupation with divination. For Xenophanes, mortals must conduct _protracted_ inquiries in the hope only for gradual, hard-won advances. The notion of disclosure negated in B18.1 competes with Xenophanes’ call for such inquiries in B18.2 because, on this notion, the gods always made _everything instantly available_ to humans, and so every object of human inquiry which was not already independently available to them. πάντα aptly conveys the entirely unrestricted range of questions – encompassing any truth – concerning which, traditionally, the gods always communicated to mortals.²³ It is an important point here that, as Lesher persuasively argues, the Greek term ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς signifies, not “(once) at the outset”, but “from the outset onwards”.²⁴ Correspondingly, the aorist tense of ὑπέδειξαν does not entail the bizarre view that, on some single, primordial occasion, gods just _once_ made a _one-off_ revelation to mortals, but then _ceased_ making revelations to mortals. Rather, the aorist ὑπέδειξαν, coupled with ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, indicates that, right from the outset of the mortal-divine relationship, and similarly onwards (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς), gods rendered instantly available to mortals ‘everything’, including any truth that they wished to attain. This view, that “from the outset onwards gods intimated everything to mortals” (B18.1), is mutually exclusive with Xenophanes’

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20 Xenophanes’ catalogue of blameworthy actions is certainly not exhaustive; Lesher renders “all sorts of things”, (1992), p. 23.
21 I discuss περὶ πάντων in B34.2 below, p. 261.
23 Including, for example, events in the past or future (“who will win the Trojan war?”, _Il_. II.303–330; “were Agis’ blankets and pillows stolen?”), Parke 1967, p. 272, no.27), current facts unknowable due to practical limitations (“how many figs are in this fig tree?”, Hes. fr.278 MW; “is Lysanias the father of Annyla’s unborn child?”, Parke 1967, p. 266, no.11) and questions essentially non-amenable to autopsy (“what does Zeus will?”, _h.Hom_. 3.131f; “what actions incurred divine wrath and which would allay it?”, _Il_. 1.92–100). Apollo famously responded to Chaerephon that no man is wiser than Socrates (Pl. _Apol_. 21a), while, in Philostratus’ biography, Apollonius of Tyana inquires which is the most perfect and pure philosophy and is delighted to discover that Trophonius endorses Pythagoreanism (Philost. VA. 8.19.40–44).
call for temporally protracted inquiries (B18.2) only because, on this view, gods 
still now render instantly available to mortals any object of inquiry which is not independently instantly available to them. In addition to Cicero’s aforementioned explicit report that Xenophanes rejected divination (A52), Xenophanes’ cosmology also supports the suggestion that B18.1 conveys a polemical attitude to (inter alia) divination. In the epic tradition, Iris the messenger (e.g. Il. XV.158f; Th. 780f) is standardly represented as an omen sent by Zeus (Il. XL.27f; Il. XVII.547f). Xenophanes’ assertion, “she whom they call Iris, this too is by nature a cloud” (B32), is thus plausibly read as a deflationary reduction of a phenomenon commonly regarded as a portentous deity. Similar reductions of a variety of atmospheric phenomena, several related to omen-divination, could also relate to a denial that such phenomena constitute encoded divine communications.

We need not, I noted, delimit Xenophanes’ criticism in B18.1 to mantic communication. A poet of the Hymns describes the disclosure of the deeds of heroes with the words θεοὶ θνητοῖσιν ἔδειξαν (h.Hom. 31.19). Using the usually mantic δείκνυμι,²⁸ the poet offers an almost verbatim and surprisingly disregarded parallel to Xenophanes’ θεοὶ θνητοῖς ὑπέδειξαν. Xenophanes, in employing the very same phrase, with the conspicuous addition of ὑ-, may thus be reacting critically also to the elusive notion of poetic inspiration, itself, as in h.Hom. 31.19, often closely associated with the discourse of divination.²⁹ Indeed, I do not

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25 We may usefully compare here Xenophanes’ use of the aorist in B38: “If god had not made [or ‘caused to grow’: ἔφυσε] yellow honey, they would have said that figs were much sweeter”. It would be rather improbable to read into this statement an elaborate and confusingly compressed deist thesis that, on some single, primordial occasion, god established certain mechanisms which now cause the generation of yellow honey without any further divine ministration. The fragment much more naturally conveys the view that, for as long as there had been yellow honey, god caused the generation of yellow honey, and still now causes it. Confirmation of this interpretation of B38, which I take to be independently more plausible, is found in B25 (discussed below), which shows that god’s intelligent and purposeful ministration of the cosmos is an ongoing affair: “But without toil he shakes all things by the thought of his mind”. Compare also Hdt. I.32 (above, p. 252), where the aorist participle ὑποδέξας conveys that god gave a show of blessedness to doomed mortals, not simply once, but right up to destroying them.


28 Above, n. 10.

29 A famous illustration of the connection between poetry and divination is the echo between Hes. Th. 32, 38 and Il. I.69f; see further Dodds (1951), pp. 80–82; Chadwick (1942), passim; note Flower’s qualifications, (2008), p. 78.
believe that my argument requires me to exclude the possibility that Xenophanes is also implying that the gods did not instantly bestow all the cultural and material prosperity which we now have (B18.1) and that we progress culturally and materially over time (B18.2). Lesher’s arguments against this reading are plausible but not conclusive.³⁰ The important point for us is that, however wide a net Xenophanes casts in B18.1, the line’s language, its opposition to the alternative of temporally protracted inquiries and Xenophanes’ polemical cosmology and reported rejection of divination all indicate that his invective against a notion of divine disclosure here conveys a polemical attitude against traditional, authoritative paradigms of disclosure, prominently including mantic communication and probably poetic inspiration.

If, therefore, ὑπέδειξαν evokes traditional paradigms of divine disclosure, and if Xenophanes bore a polemical attitude to these paradigms (a point further supported by the discussion of B34 below), we may follow the majority reading of B18.1 to this extent: Xenophanes is unlikely to have allowed that the gods did intimate to mortals cryptically and indirectly some things at some points, agreeing with the criticised view about the manner of disclosure (ὑπέδειξαν), while disagreeing only about its temporal and quantitative scope. Equally, however, Xenophanes is unlikely to be rejecting divine disclosure categorically. The central objection of the minority reading remains persuasive. Xenophanes carefully formulates a highly qualified view and it is implausible to return to him the same view divested of those qualifications. Instead of following standard terminology (say, θεοὶ θνητοῖσιν ἔδειξαν, as in h.Hom. 31.19), Xenophanes chose a pointedly exceptional term for disclosure, which highlights the notions of indirect, cryptic or secretive intimation. ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς and πάντα, furthermore, are indeed emphatic qualifications. Rejecting the view that from the beginning the gods disclosed everything in an indirect and cryptic manner, while a pointed critical representation of traditional conceptions of disclosure, would be a remarkably peculiar way of stating that the gods never and in no way disclosed anything to mortals. Fortunately, we have evidence, I believe, that Xenophanes did in fact formulate an alternative:

ὁππόσα δὴ θνητοῖσι πεφήνασι εἰσοράασθαι (B36).

³⁰ Lesher reasonably points out that Xenophanes is acutely aware of socially destructive practices, developments and authorities (B1–3, 10–12); (1991), pp. 231–237; (1992), pp. 15f. Note, though, that Herodotus does speak of god as (misleadingly) ‘intimating’ a flourishing state: ὑποδείξας ὄλβον ὁ θεὸς, I.32.
It is, in fact, difficult to determine whether πεφήνασιν should be read transitively or intransitively. I will argue, however, that, on either construal, these words are best interpreted as conveying a notion of divine disclosure. Although we would otherwise expect the second perfect of φαίνω to carry an intransitive sense (“however many things have appeared for mortals to look upon”⁴³), this is at least balanced by the consideration that such a reading of B36 would leave us with ὁππόσα as a neuter nominative taking a plural verb, a usage of ὁπ(π)όσα for which there is, to my knowledge, no parallel in extant archaic and classical Greek.³² In B18.1, moreover, θυητοῖς ύπεδείξαν is transitive, which perhaps suggests a correspondingly transitive sense for the structurally parallel θυητοῖοι πεφήνασιν: “however many things they have disclosed for mortals to look upon”.³³ On either grammatical construal, however, given the interpretation of B18.1 advanced above, B36, read as expressing some notion of divine disclosure, would answer our independent expectation for Xenophanes to articulate such a notion which is not tainted by the characteristics of the highly qualified notion of disclosure which he rejects in B18.1. This is especially so if, as I will presently argue, the account of mortal experiences in B36 (to put it in a way which accommodates both the transitive and the intransitive construals of πεφήνασιν) precisely inverts the account rejected in B18.1. With this last consideration in mind, we would still plausibly maintain that πεφήνασιν refers implicitly to the agency that underlies mortal experiences even if we construe it intransitively (with ὁππόσα very peculiarly as its subject). Herodotus (IX.120) offers an instructive parallel.³⁴ We could read πέφηνε here intransitively (“Athenian stranger, do not fear this portent, for [sc. it] has not appeared to you (πέφηνε), but it is to me that Protesilaus of Elaeus signifies that …”) or transitively (“for Protesilaus of Elaeus has not shown [sc. it] to you (πέφηνε), but it is to me that he signifies that …”). On either construal, the passage would still demonstrate how naturally this terminology can signify that certain appearances (ὁππόσα, B36; τὸ τέρας τοῦτο, Hdt. IX.120) have appeared to their recipients (θυητοῖοι, B36; ἐμοί, Hdt. IX.120) at the instigation of a divine power.

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31 Similarly translated e.g. by DK, ad loc; Burnet (1930), p. 121; Edmonds (1931), ad loc; Guthrie (1962), p. 397; noted as possible by Lesher (1992), p. 177.
32 A TLG search of all occurrences of ὁππόσα and ὁπόσα in texts up to and including Aristotle indicates that the term is far more often accusative (as in II. XXIV.7; Od. XIV.7) and, when nominative, invariably takes, as one would expect, a singular verb (e.g. h. Hom. 2.365; Hes. fr.204.113 MW).
33 Similarly translated e.g. by Lesher (1992), p. 39; Barnes (1982), p. 140.
34 ξεῖνε Ἀθηναῖε, μηδὲν φοβέο τὸ τέρας τοῦτο· οὐ γὰρ σοὶ πέφηνε, ἀλλ’ ἐμοί σημαίνει ὁ ἐν Ἐλαιοῦντι Πρωτεσίλεως κτλ.
If पुष्प्यास्तिक is transitive, ‘Gods’ is, of course, the only candidate for the subject. As Lesher (1992) himself points out, who else could make things evident to ‘mortals’ if not the immortals (cf. θεοί θνητοῖς, B18.1)?³⁵ We may further support the impression that the verb likely expresses a notion of disclosure even if it carries an intransitive sense by raising and addressing the following question: should we read B36 as a whole as the fragment of a statement made in propría persona?

First, we have no reason not to take B36 in this way. Since it is undeniable that Xenophanes employs polytheistic language positively, attributions of theorised monotheism, themselves derived from a questionable reading of B23, pose no obstacles.³⁶ Hussey’s claim that the particle δή is “distancing … which suggests irony and/or quotation of others’ views” betrays desperation.³⁷ More importantly, we do have reason to read B36 positively, for, I argue, the positive account of mortal experiences in B36 is the reversal of the view negated in the polemical B18.1. The verb φαίνω is the standard, bland term for divine disclosure and conveys none of the pointed undertones of the language of B18.1 (ὑπέδειξαν).³⁸ The denial that the gods intimated everything (πάντα … θνητοῖς) is fittingly balanced by a statement concerning the scope of what the gods have disclosed (ὁππόσα δὴ θνητοῖσι). Finally, if in B18.1 Xenophanes rejects the view that from the beginning the gods intimated everything (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς), his talk in B36 of however many things the gods have disclosed allows that the current set of disclosed things may vary.³⁹ Since, therefore, B18.1 rejects only a very particu-

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³⁶ I take no issue with the view of Xenophanes’ theology as incipiently monotheistic insofar as it may imply a reconceptualisation of the divine as the greatest god (B23–26, see Schofield 1997, p. 72f) even if the rendering of εἷς θεός κτλ as “there is one god” is itself highly improbable (see Stokes 1971, pp. 76–78). The important point for us is that such tendencies cannot warrant the suppression of B36 because of its polytheistic language (on the transitive reading of पुष्प्यास्तिक) in a thinker who uses both polytheistic and monotheistic language apparently interchangeably when speaking positively about the divine (esp. B1.24; cf. B34.2 and, more contentiously, B18, B11f, B14–16). This fact itself problematises ascriptions of full-fledged monotheism. As Schofield suggested to me, Xenophanes most probably remained vague on the numerical question. Indeed, for a card-carrying monotheist, ἐν τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνθρώποισι (B23) would be a terrifically ill-formulated and misleading phrase; cf. Guthrie (1962), p. 375; Vlastos (1970), p. 94, n.8; Broadie (1999), p. 210.
³⁷ Hussey (1990), p. 25, n.37.
³⁸ E.g. II. II.308, 318, 324, 353; II. IV.381; Od. III.173f; Od. XXI.413; cf. also Hdt. IX.120 (πάρῃ), cited above, n. 34.
³⁹ This, we shall see, is significant given Xenophanes’ engagement (discussed below) with the possibility that the available body of evidence may change and that counter-evidence may be discovered.
lar notion of divine disclosure with carefully qualified characteristics, and since 
B36 constitutes a precise reversal of this notion of disclosure, the latter fragment 
most likely either implies (if πεφήνασιν is intransitive) or refers to (if πεφήνασιν 
is transitive) an alternative notion of disclosure which is precisely innocent of 
those same characteristics. The notion of disclosure advanced in B36 (θνητοῖσι 
πεφήνασιν) supplants the one rejected in B18.1 (θνητοῖς υπέδειξαν).

Both majority and minority interpreters have disregarded B36 when discussing 
B18 and Xenophanes’ views on divine disclosure.⁴⁰ Indeed, Lesher considers B36 
a statement made in propria persona, reads ‘gods’ as the subject, recognises that 
the fragment implies divine influence on mortal inquiry, and yet does not revise 
his (majority) reading of B18.1, i.e. his view that Xenophanes rejected categori-
cally the notion of divine disclosure.⁴¹ The carefully qualified B18.1, however, 
criticises a highly specific notion of disclosure, while B36 advances an alterna-
tive notion. Xenophanes, it follows, did not merely admit that in some undefined 
sense the divine influences mortal inquiry, but explicitly represented that influ-
ence as a form of divine disclosure. Contra Lesher, B18.1 is not “a firmly nega-
tive comment [...] on the question of divine agency”, but a firm rejection of one 
particular conception of divine agency.⁴² We must, then, employ more nuanced 
vocabulary. We cannot speak of Xenophanes’ position on disclosure simpliciter. 
Rather, Xenophanes replaces what he takes to be the traditional view with his 
own, alternative conception.

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⁴⁰ A stimulating exception: Barnes observes, without further comment, that B18 is comple-
mented by B36 (1982, p. 140). The common assertion that disclosure “is not the sort of thing 
Xenophanes’ god ... does” (McKirahan 1994, pp. 68f; cf. Mogyoródi 2006, p. 144; Wardle 2006, 
p. 107) perhaps discouraged recognition that B36 may express an alternative, novel notion of 
disclosure.

⁴¹ Lesher (1991), pp. 243, n.32; 266, n.45 (on B36); 230, with 231, n.6 and 242, n.29 (on disclosure). 
Lesher (1992) raises parenthetically in a laconic question the possibility that B36 and B38 may 
suggest a role for divine agency in the inquiry advocated in B18.2 (p. 152). Despite recognising 
that B36 suggests divine influence on the formation of mortal beliefs (see pp. 5, 157, 178f), he 
does not consider its ramifications for his previous account of Xenophanes’ reaction to notions 
of divination and disclosure (pp. 153–155) nor revisits B18 in his commentaries on B36 and B38 
149, n.84 (on B36), 127 (on disclosure).

What else, then, can we say about this alternative conception?

Let us first ask what Xenophanean disclosure will not be. It will not amount to traditional mantic communication, i.e. the signification of true propositions concerning any matter by the disclosure of objects which possess non-natural meaning,⁴³ or to poetic inspiration. The gods do not infuse Xenophanes with song nor communicate messages cryptically through signs. Since, furthermore, Xenophanes maintains that, concerning certain matters, mortals cannot attain clear and certain knowledge (B34), Xenophanean disclosure could not guarantee such knowledge. B34 demands closer analysis, but one that will nonetheless be necessarily brief and selective: I cannot, of course, address here adequately the numerous controversies surrounding the fragment.

And that which is clear and certain (τὸ σαφές) no man has seen nor will there be anyone who knows about the gods and what I say about all things; for even if, in the best case, someone succeeded in speaking what has been fulfilled (τετελεσμένον), still he himself does not know; but belief is fashioned for all.

τὸ σαφές, that which Xenophanes denies any man knows “about the gods and what I say about all things”, indicates veracity, clarity, and certitude.⁴⁴ Numerous, generically heterogeneous texts associate this terminology with the knowledge, pronouncements or, once, person of the mantis.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Lesher convincingly highlights the sense of ‘that which has come to completion or fulfilment’ in τετελεσμένον, Xenophanes’ term for the object of true statements and beliefs (but not thereby knowledge), and the term’s provenance in Homeric divination.⁴⁶ Diviners, indeed, inquire above all into the disposition and will of the gods (e.g. h.Hom. 3.131f, 539a), the fruition of whose designs is standardly expressed as their arrival at their telos.⁴⁷ The same terminology is used formulaically for

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⁴³ Cf. Denyer: “[omens] mean the facts they signify, not in the way clouds mean rain, but in the way that a road sign means a bridge ahead”, (1985), p. 5.
⁴⁵ Lesher (1983), p. 31 cites Il. XII.228f (σάφα θυμῷ εἴδείπ); Od. I.202 (μάντις ... οἰωνῶν σάφα εἴδως) and XVII.153 (οὐ σάφα οἶδεν, Theoclymenus contrasting his own divinatory knowledge with Telemachus’ ignorance). Cf. e.g. Soph. Philoc. 1338; OT. 285f, 390 (of the diver himself, cf. Lesher 1983, p. 39, n.34); Eur. Hipp. 346; fr.A82.2 Nauck; note especially fr.795 Nauck; Hdt. VII.228; playfully at Pl. Phdr. 242c3–6; Rep. 523a8 (cf. also Phd. 69b4–6; Ti. 72b7–c1).
the formation and fulfillment of mantic predictions.⁴⁸ In the Iliad and Odyssey, τετελεσμένον is invariably associated with statements concerning future states-of-affairs.⁴⁹ In the formula τελέσαι δέ με θυμὸς ἄνωγεν, εἰ δύναμαι τελέσαι γε και εἰ τετελεσμένον ἔστιν, the concluding phrase carries the force ‘if it is to be fulfilled’.⁵⁰ More pointedly, the formula οἱ γὰρ τούτοι, ἐξείναι, ἔπος τετελεσμένον ἐἴη expresses the desire to see a prediction come to pass and is addressed twice to the seer Theoclymenus (Od. XV.536; Od. XVII.163, where Theoclymenus had just claimed sure, mantic knowledge: αὕρα, Od. XVII.153f) and once to Odysseus upon his ‘prediction’ of his own imminent arrival (Od. XIX.309). In Od. XIX.547, the eagle-Odysseus, undertaking the role of oneiropolos, employs the term when divining from Penelope’s dream of the slaughtered geese (ὅ τοι τετελεσμένον ἔσται). Xenophanes, of course, appropriates and employs this Homeric notion of ‘that which has been fulfilled’ more broadly as the object of all unknowledgeable true statements and beliefs “about the gods and what I say about all things”.

By highlighting the scope of the matters to which his denial of knowledge refers – “about the gods and what I say about all things” – Xenophanes demonstrates that, at this juncture, when formulating the essential limitations of mortal epistemology, he is concerned in particular with mortal statements about non-everyday, non-pedestrian, non-experienced matters.⁵¹ The phrase ‘about the gods’ reflects this emphasis in itself. “What I say about all things” (ἃσσα … πάντων), furthermore, is unlikely to signify ‘all statements’ unqualifiedly, since, if ‘all things’ (πάντων) includes the gods, their separate mention becomes curious. The phrase thus more likely signifies cosmological universal generalisations or, since πάντα can refer to more than just cosmic processes (B11.1; B2.10), perhaps universal generalisations as such. Furthermore, Xenophanes’ insistence that no mortal has ‘seen’ the clear and certain truth, and that even the one who possesses

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⁴⁸ μαντεύσομαι … ὡς τελέεσθαι ὀΐω (Od. I.200–202; Od. XV.I73f); τὰ δὴ νῦν πάντα τελεῖται (II. II.330; Od. II.176; Od. V.302; Od. XIII.178; cf. II. XIV/8; Od. XVIII.271); Zeus’ eagle is, qua omen, τελειότατον πετεηνῶν (Il. VIII.247; Il. XXIV.315); note τετελεσμένον as divinely ‘appointed’, h.Hom. 4.572; cf. Op. 799.
⁴⁹ The most common formula (14 occurrences) is ἐρέω, τὸ δὲ καὶ τετελεσμένον ἔσται (vel sim.), used especially for threats and promises, e.g. Il. I.212; II. VIII.401; Od. II.187; cf. Il. IX.310.
⁵⁰ Il. XIV.195f; Il. XVIII.426f; Od. V.89f.
true belief does not **himself** know (αὐτός), suggests a concern with the unavailability of personal experience or cognition, and that our inability to speak knowledgeably about such matters is related to our inability, in these cases, to consider directly and fully the body of evidence which bears on our statements.⁵³

Mantic disclosure was a, if not the, culturally predominant paradigm of attaining knowledge about non-experienced matters⁵⁴ and, in particular, about the gods.⁵⁵ As Lesher (1983) argues, moreover, in pointing out that even the hypothetical best-case-scenario of a true statement does not imply sure, personal knowledge, Xenophanes undermines what could seem the strongest case for mantic knowledge claims, namely divination’s purported track record (e.g. Pl. Euthyph. 3c (note περὶ τῶν θείων); Cic. De div. I.13.23).⁵⁶ Xenophanes’ criticism is further supported by the tension, inherent in the divinatory system itself, between mantic knowledge claims and the widespread recognition of the conjunctural status of individual mantic statements (discussed below, pp. 274ff.). Nonetheless, and despite Xenophanes’ pointed adoption of mantic terminology, here too poetic inspiration may be high on his agenda. Homer famously invokes Muses who **witnessed**, and are thus knowledgeable, to guide the unknowledgeable poet’s narrative (β. II.485f).⁵⁷ Again, Hesiod’s Muses facilitate his authoritative disquisition on seafaring precisely despite his inexperience (Op. 660–662). In B18, recall, Xenophanes moves directly from rejecting such traditional models of disclosure (B18.1) to explaining the actual epistemological predication of

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54 Cf. above, n. 23. Interestingly, when Anytus claims to know what sort of people sophists are despite having no experience of them (ὅπερος αὐτῶν), Socrates jokingly identifies mantic means as the only possible explanation, Men. 92c–7.

55 See e.g. Eur. fr.795 Nauck: θάκοις μαντικοῖς ἐνήμενοι / σαφῶς διόμνυσθ’ εἰδέναι τὰ δαιμόνων ... θεῶν ἐπιτυχοντα πέμπτην. For τὰ μάλιστα as a hypothetical best-case-scenario, see Lesher (1992), p. 158. τόχοι could suggest an element of chance (contra Yonezawa 1989, p. 433) but need not exclude volition pursued methodically (Fränkel 1974, p. 126). At h.Hom. 4,566, the verb expresses the condition of a successful mantic consultation (οφείλεται τῷ χαράκτα;).

56 Indeed, Snell reads B34 as an allusion to these lines, (1953), p. 139.
mortal (B18.2). The two couplets constituting B34 display, I believe, the same structure. Xenophanes highlights matters external to mortal experience as those concerning which mortals lack sure knowledge, and employs pointed mantic terminology to express the objects of knowledge (τὸ σαφές) and true statements and beliefs (τετελεσμένον). These observations, along with the parallel structure of B18, suggest that, here too, Xenophanes progresses from denying a traditional, optimistic concept of disclosure to describing the actual predicament of mortals. Xenophanes derives the essential epistemic limitations of mortals, their inability to attain knowledge concerning non-experienced matters, from his rejection of the notions of disclosure and mantic communication traditionally thought to facilitate such knowledge and to enable mortals to transcend these limitations.

The future tense in οὐδέ τις ἔσται indicates a modal thesis regarding what is possible and impossible for the ἀνήρ. Lesher (1983) himself recognises that his interpretation leaves Xenophanes with an apparently invalid inference: why should the argument that mortals cannot attain knowledge through divine disclosure merit the conclusion that they cannot attain it simpliciter? He offers two explanations: first, diviners enjoyed the status of paradigm cases. Since the conditions of knowledge cannot be met in the most promising cases, they cannot be met. Second, though he denies divine disclosure categorically, Xenophanes retains the traditional premiss that only through divine disclosure could mortals attain knowledge. Xenophanes is, I think, unlikely to have continued to consider diviners the most promising candidates for knowledge after systematically exposing their divination as an empty illusion. Lesher’s second explanation initially looks more promising. Here too, however, it is difficult to accept that Xenophanes uncritically and unreflectively took on the assumptions operative in divination concerning the conditions for the possibility of knowledge while disagreeing only about the possibility of fulfilling these conditions. Was Xenophanes unable to approach the question of knowledge except through a conceptual-theological framework of divine disclosure, which, according to Lesher, he himself repudiated categorically as fundamentally ill-conceived? These unpalatable ramifications stem from the oversimplifying assumption that Xenophanes discards disclosure altogether. Xenophanes, I suggest, identifies what mortals can or cannot know through divine disclosure with what they can or cannot know simpliciter because he shares with those he criticises the fundamental premiss that the nature of divine disclosure determines the manner in which, and certainty with which, mortals form propositions concerning non-experienced matters. Although he indeed arrives at his view of mortal limitations by rejecting traditional notions

of disclosure, it is no accident that Xenophanes employs divinatory terminology (τὸ σαφὲς, τετελεσμένον) positively. The thrust of B34 is that, contrary to traditional theological beliefs, divine disclosure is not such as to make knowledge about non-experienced matters possible.

Disabused of the illusion that divine disclosure consists in the indirect intimation of everything from the beginning (B18.1), and is such as to bring sure and clear knowledge within mortal grasp (B34.1f), we can now turn to the role of disclosure in the facilitation of mortal inquiry (B18.2) and the formation of conjectural beliefs (B34.3f).

In itself, B36 only speaks of a set of things which the gods enabled mortals to experience. In all likelihood, however, Xenophanes is interested in these objects of experience as objects which the gods disclosed as evidence and which mortals employed as such when forming beliefs and conjectures.⁵⁹ B18.1 rejects a misguided conception of disclosure and B18.2 advocates in its stead temporally protracted inquiries: “but searching in time they discover better”. Since, then, Xenophanes advances in B36 his own conception of disclosure as a reversal of and an alternative to the one rejected in B18.1, his conception of disclosure most probably relates to the inquiries advocated in B18.2 and, therefore, to the way in which mortals form judgements and beliefs through such inquiries.⁶⁰ Xenophanes, furthermore, advances some notion of mortal-oriented divine action (θνητοῖσι πεφήνασιν, B36) to replace the one he rejects (θνητοῖς ὑπέδειξαν, B18.1). The echo between the two phrases suggests that, in Xenophanean disclosure, the gods still in some sense act purposively towards mortals. Xenophanes’ use of the final infinitive εἰσοράασθαι corroborates this impression and goes some way towards sharpening the purpose in question. Standardly, such final infinitives not only imply volition in the performance of the action signified by the finite verb, but also clarify the purpose for which that action was performed: regularly, x does something to or for y so that y performs another action signified by the infinitive. Consider Od. V.196f:

... the Nymph laid out before him all kinds of nourishment to eat and drink (ἔσθειν καὶ πίνειν).⁶¹

⁵⁹ Scholars often see in B36 a connection between perception and judgement-formation, see e.g. Eisenstadt (1974), p. 149; Lesher (1992), pp. 178f.

⁶⁰ Note, moreover, that φαίνω is a standard term for divine disclosure influencing mortal belief-formation, see the passages listed above, n. 38.

⁶¹ Cf. e.g. Il. VII.75–77; Hes. Th. 218f; Thgn. 446; see further Smyth (1972), pp. 446f.
As the Nymph lays out food before her guest *in order that* he will eat and drink it, so too in B36 the gods show things or (if ἑπονεῖσιν is intransitive) things appear (through divine agency) for mortals *to look upon*, i.e. *in order that* they will look upon them.

The final infinitive εἰσοράασθαι thus supports further also the impression that Xenophanean disclosure concerns belief-formation. Elsewhere in the extant fragments, we find Xenophanes employing verbs of perception to express the import of the perception in question for the formation, retention or revision of a belief or judgement: ἰδέσθαι (B32), concerning the nature of the rainbow; ὁρᾶται (B28), concerning the upper limits of the earth and, less literally, προσορᾶν (B2.6), concerning the perceived social status of a victorious athlete. Retaining also the perceptual connotations of εἰσοράασθαι, we may perhaps gloss B36 as “however many perceptible things the gods disclosed for mortals *to consider*”.

As a thinker who is preoccupied with our inability to consider directly all the evidence which bears on matters which exceed our experience, Xenophanes is naturally concerned with the ways in which our experiential repertoire, so to speak, influences our formation of beliefs. B38 instructively reflects this concern and offers independent evidence for divine influence on mortal perceptual experience and belief-formation:

If god had not made yellow honey, they would have said that figs were much sweeter.

Xenophanes’ counter-factual thought-experiment shows that, if honey had not been part of the evidence available for us to consider, we would have judged differently concerning figs. In the first instance, B38 seems to caution that even some statements that concern what is experienced (say, “honey is the sweetest food” or “honey is very sweet”), and that appear to be grounded in a direct inspection of the entire relevant body of evidence and not to involve implications concerning what we cannot experience, do in fact involve such implications, and are therefore corrigible given the possibility of currently unknown counter-evidence.⁶² Unless mortals can exclude the existence of unknown members of a class whose discovery would require a revision of current judgements concerning

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⁶² Some, not all: we can say with certainty that all the figs we tasted thus far were less sweet than all the honey we tasted. B38 does undermine, however, Fränkel’s imputation to Xenophanes, on the basis of B36, of the complacent view that sure knowledge is secured for mortals concerning whatever they experience directly (1974), pp. 123–125; followed by Eisenstadt (1974), p. 149, n.33; Darcus (1978), p. 33; Drozdek (2004), p. 152. Fränkel’s interpretation conflicts also with Aëtius’ report that Xenophanes traced the common but mistaken belief in the sun’s circular orbit...
other members of that class (as, for example, the discovery of a substance sweeter than honey would require us to revise our current judgements concerning the relative sweetness of honey), these judgements can be asserted only conjecturally.⁶³ The vast majority of our beliefs thus commit us to more than what is empirically guaranteed by our experience.⁶⁴ In this respect, B38 implies further, I think, an a fortiori argument: the same corrigibility would of course characterise statements about non-experienced matters, such as the statement that all growing things consist of earth and water (B29) on the basis of our observation of growing things within our experiential repertoire.

The central point for us is the following: to express a scenario in which yellow honey was never available to us as evidence, Xenophanes constructs a scenario in which god has never made yellow honey available to us as evidence. Xenophanes’ point is that if god had not enabled us to taste honey, we would have formed different beliefs concerning figs and concerning sweetness: his contention is not that we might have judged differently had god not made honey in such times and places that we could not taste it even if he had made it. The foregoing discussions of B18, B36, and B34 indicate that the theological language of this fragment should be taken seriously. In B38, Xenophanes is not simply observing that judgements are constrained by the available evidence. The fragment reflects a broader point concerning the relation between the range of experiences with which the divine presents us and the beliefs and conjectures we form on the basis of these experiences. Had god not facilitated for any mortal the particular experiences he did, or had he facilitated different experiences in addition, that mortal’s judgements might have turned out otherwise.⁶⁵ B38 and B36 thus illuminate one another. B38 demonstrates the same preoccupation as B36 with divine facilitation of mortal perceptual experience, but, unlike the truncated B36, explicitly connects this facilitation with the formation of judgement. Again, taken in isolation, B38 shows only the influence of divine action on mortal perceptual experience and so belief-formation. B36 demonstrates that Xenophanes could conceive of this sort of divine influence as, in some sense, purposive (θητοῖσι πεφήνασιν εἰσοράασθαι).

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⁶⁵ Lesher observes that the fundamental point of B38 is mortal dependence on the divine, (1992), pp. 180f.
Any attempt to determine more precisely what kind of volition the gods display towards us would unfortunately be necessarily speculative. I would like to outline two possible alternatives. On the first alternative, which I tentatively favour, Xenophanes radically reconceptualises the notion of divine disclosure as the notion that the gods have purposively enabled us to perceive and consider everything that we perceive and consider (call this ‘universal disclosure’). On the second, only some of the things that we experience and consider have been brought to our attention and disclosed for our consideration by the gods (‘particular disclosures’). In other words, does ὁππόσα (B36) signify the totality (universal disclosure) or only a subset (particular disclosures) of the perceptual experiences of mortals?

Let me first clarify what I mean by ‘universal disclosure’. Since, as mortal agents, we are essentially limited both spatially and temporally, the range of things we can perceive and consider is also necessarily limited. Furthermore, it is on the basis of this limited range of things that we form beliefs and conjectures about any matter, whether internal or external to our experience. According to universal disclosure, the divine determines the scope and content of the experiences included within the necessarily limited experiential repertoire of any mortal agent, intending (inter alia, of course) to facilitate the general discursive engagement of mortals with their surroundings and so their formation of beliefs on the basis of their experiences (πεφήνασιν εἰσοράασθαι).

B25 is pertinent here:

ἀλλ’ ἀπάνευθε πόνοιο νόου φρενὶ πάντα κραδαίνει

But without toil he shakes all things by the thought [or ‘will’] of his mind.

However we cash out precisely the interrelation of god’s φρήν and νόος, Xenophanes’ specification that his god possesses these psychic organs (reminiscent of the traditional Zeus), and exerts his cosmic influence through them,

66 Perhaps most plausibly, Darcus reads φρηνί as an instrumental-locative dative, signifying the psychic organ with and in which god’s mind operates, (1978), p. 26; cf. e.g. II. 11.3; II. XVI.435 and the closest Homeric parallels II. IX.600 (νόει φρεσί) and XXII.235 (νοέω φρεσί); see further KRS, p. 170, n.3; Darcus (1994), pp. 109–111; Darcus (1995), p. 39. Given B24, god would be spatially coextensive with the particular psychic organ φρήν. Alternatively, we may render “by the will (φρηνί) of his mind,” e.g. Cleve (1965), p. 22. For φρήν as signifying divine volition, see e.g. II. X.45; II. XV.194 and the close parallel at Aesch. Supp. 100–103; cf. von Fritz (1974), p. 34; Darcus (1994), p. 110.
strongly suggests a notion of intelligent, purposeful cosmic governance.⁶⁷ The term νοεῖν signifies the cognition of a situation, analogous in its non-inferential operation to sense-perception, as with Xenophanes’ god at B24: ὁρᾷ [...] νοεῖ [...] ἀκούει.⁶⁸ Already in our earliest sources, however, νοεῖν designates further a volitional reaction to the situation cognised, wherefore both the verbal and substantive forms came to signify the activity or product of planning and, from similar volitional reactions to similar situations, the disposition and character of the cognising and planning agent.⁶⁹ The ever-observant νόος of Zeus (Il. XV.461) is frequently his will or plan.⁷⁰ In this respect, Zeus’ superior νόος not only comprehends but also moulds and fashions the pattern of events, sometimes directly affecting or determining mortal actions.⁷¹

Xenophanes posits a perfect correspondence between god’s intelligent volition and its effortless realisation in states-of-affairs (ἀπάνευθε πόνοι). Notably, Zeus’ Olympus-shaking nod to Thetis in Il. I.528–530, an oft-cited parallel to B25, indicates his considered adoption of a course of action, which will now progress to its inexorable conclusion.⁷² As we saw above, the fruition of divine plans is standardly expressed as their arrival at their telos.⁷³ In the light of B25, Xenophanes’ talk of the object of a veridical statement as “that which has been fulfilled” (τετελεσμένον) appears to stem from a theological world-view that construes states-of-affairs as the fulfilment of divine volition. Our evidence belies Lesher’s (1983) assimilation of Xenophanes’ implicit view to the explicit Epicurean one, that celestial events take place without the ministration of an immortal being.⁷⁴ His statement (1992) that Xenophanes’ cosmology banishes the traditional gods “to the explanatory sidelines” is misleading: Xenophanes


⁶⁸ E.g. Il. III.396ff; Od. XVI.160.

⁶⁹ E.g. plan: Il. IV.308f; Od. II.122; disposition: Il. XVI.34f; Od. I.3; Od. IX.175f.


⁷¹ Mogyoródi notes this (2002), p. 283, n.140.

⁷² Above, p. 261, with n. 47; cf. also Th. 1002; h.Hom. 4.10 (μεγάλοι Διός νόος ἐξετελεῖτο); h.Hom. 23.2; h.Hom. 2.323; Thgn. 142 (θεοὶ δὲ κατὰ σφέτερον πάντα τελοῦσι νόον).

⁷³ Above, p. 261, with n. 47; cf. also Th. 1002; h.Hom. 4.10 (μεγάλοι Διός νόος ἐξετελεῖτο); h.Hom. 23.2; h.Hom. 2.323; Thgn. 142 (θεοὶ δὲ κατὰ σφέτερον πάντα τελοῦσι νόον).

eliminates rather than ‘sidelines’ the traditional, anthropomorphic gods, but his
divinity retains cosmological explanatory prominence.⁷⁵ Nor can I agree with
Mogyoródi that Xenophanes maintains “a categorical distinction between nature
and the divine”.⁷⁶ First, god’s dissimilarity cannot be categorical. For one thing,
if god’s physical dissimilarity (οὔτι δέμας δηντροῖον ὁμοίος) meant that he lacked
a physical body, by parity of reasoning he would also be left without a mind
(οὔτε νόημα, B23.2).⁷⁷ Second, whatever the spatial relation between god and the
natural world (if Xenophanes ever addressed this question), B38 guarantees that
god facilitates directly even minute processes occurring in that world, while B25
indicates that such facilitation is exercised intelligently, purposively and univer-
sally.

If god’s ‘growing’ of honey (to render ἔφυσε, B38) is an instance of the
causal facilitation of such ‘growing’ in general, then, since the class of things
that “become and grow” (ὅσα γίνοντ’ Ἦδε φίονται) consist of earth and water
(B29), and since we mortals too “come to be from earth and water” (ἐκγενόμεσθα,
B33), the continual emergence and preservation of particular mortal lives are
themselves part of god’s intelligent governance. In disclosing things for mortals
to consider, the divine could display towards them the same sort of cosmic,
intelligent volition which it displays in directing all natural processes, however
large-scale or minute. Making possible and realising (i) the scope and content
of any mortal’s experiential repertoire, (ii) mortals themselves as perceptive and
intellective agents and (iii) the discursive engagement of mortals with the world
around them (εἰσοράασθαι) would thus be part of the divine’s cosmic plan. On
this reading, ὁππόσα (B36) comprises the totality of mortal experiences. God’s
making of honey, then, represents a genuine instance of disclosure, while mortal
belief-formation and conjectural reasoning are indeed informed and constrained
by the evidence which the divine resolved to disclose (B38). Xenophanes, on the
universal reading, discards the mantic idea that a subset of our experiences was
occasioned by the divine to encourage the formation of particular judgements.
Rather, he counters, everything we see, everything we experience has appeared to
us (in part) for us to look upon and consider.

⁷⁵ Lesher (1992), p. 137; cf. Classen (1989), p. 96. It has been argued that the view that the world
is governed by intelligent, divine power was a pervasive and long unquestioned assumption in
the sixth and early fifth centuries, see Sedley (2007), pp. 1–8; Guthrie (1952), esp. pp. 90–93, 96;
in fact attributes both categorical dissimilarity and a body to Xenophanes’ god, ascribing the
Importantly, it does not follow from this reading of B36 that the divine is especially concerned with mortals. B36 reflects rather that Xenophanes is especially concerned with this particular aspect of intelligent and purposeful divine actions, namely, the sense in which some of them purposively facilitate, among innumerable other things of course, mortal experience and belief-formation (θητοῖσι πεφήνασιν εἰσοράασθαι). By maintaining that the divine enables us to experience, and to engage with our experiences discursively, Xenophanes would of course not be suggesting that it runs the cosmos simply or especially so that mortals will have something to think about.⁷⁸

The phrase “belief (δόκος) is fashioned (τέτυκται) for all”⁷⁹ in B34.4 is also pertinent here. Lesher observes that, in Homer, τέτυκται commonly signifies things fashioned for mortals by gods.⁸⁰ Indeed, τέτυκται can indicate the lot of mortals (and also immortals) as determined by their place within a world-order regulated by divine agency only through which things are (made to be) what they are.⁸¹ The oft-cited Orphic slogan Διὸς δ’ ἐκ πάντα τέτυκται celebrates Zeus as the ruler and preserver of both cosmic events and specifically mortal existence.⁸²

According to universal disclosure, the divine indeed fashions opinion or opining (δόκος) for all.

According to the particular disclosures alternative, on the other hand, the divine brings particular things to the consideration of some mortals (εἰσοράασθαι) in some circumstances. This does not mean, of course, that the gods communicate messages. Rather, they guide these mortals in their formation of inquisitive (ζητοῦντες, B18.2) beliefs, and perhaps also everyday ones.⁸³ Xenophanes could have been concerned to insist that, given the essential spatio-temporal limitations of mortals, even if some conjectures are based on such disclosures, they cannot support knowledge claims (B34). We should not exclude offhand the possibility that Xenophanean deities could show such concern for individual mortals. Xenophanes prescribes prayers for the capacity to act justly (B1.13–16), possibly

⁷⁸ I am grateful to Patricia Curd for pressing me to clarify this point.
⁷⁹ Or, less likely, “over all things”. The parallel between τὸ ... οἰκεῖο ἄνθρωπος ... δόκος ἐπὶ πᾶσι suggests to me that πᾶσι is masculine.
⁸¹ See e.g. II. XVIII.115–121; II. III.101; h.Hom. 5.29–32; h.Hom. 2.269; II. IV.84 = II. XIX.224; II. XIV.246; II. XXI.191; Hes. Op. 744f, 752; cf. h.Hom. 2.86 (ἐτύχθη).
⁸² Pderv. col.17.12 (cf. col.19.10); Pl. Lg. 715a8–716a1 with the scholiast; ps.-Ar. De mundo 401b25ff (ἀρχος ἁπάντων); Forph. apud Eus. PE. III.9.2 (μέγας ἁρχος ἁπάντων); for these passages, cf. Palmer (1998), pp. 26–31 (not discussing B34.4). Classen mentions the parallel, (1989), p. 100.
⁸³ God’s making of honey in B38 would reflect a preoccupation with divine influence on mortal beliefs without necessarily constituting an instance of the disclosure spoken of in B36.
signalling that the divine may aid those, whose prayers it heeds, to do so. His criticism of imputations of immorality to the gods (B11f) could imply that such predications constitute category errors, but could, conversely, suggest an insistence on the moral goodness of the gods to whom we are to pray for the capacity to act justly.⁸⁴ Again, Xenophanes reportedly observed that an oath is not an equal challenge for pious and impious men, in all likelihood because the latter do not fear divine retribution.⁸⁵ Still, one may reasonably insist that, Xenophanes’ talk of prayers notwithstanding, the cognitive dissimilarity of the divine (B23) should involve a lack of particular awareness of, or concern for, particular mortal affairs, and that a non-anthropomorphic Xenophanean deity is consequently a less personal being than particular disclosures require. When affirming god’s immobility, Xenophanes employs a verb of motion which suggests direct divine interference in particular mortal affairs.⁸⁶ Indeed, if Xenophanes held that the gods disclose particular things to particular mortals in particular circumstances, it becomes more difficult to see what he found so objectionable about mantic communication in the first place.

Arguably, then, universal disclosure is the more probable interpretation of the notion of divine, mortal-oriented purpose operative in Xenophanes’ notion of divine disclosure.

Universal disclosure would, and particular disclosures could, influence the formation of mortal beliefs, not just concerning the natural world, but whenever a discursive engagement with observed experience plays a formative role. Xenophanes’ critically digested experience of the fall of Colophon, for example, supports his contention that luxury is socially deleterious (B3). But this raises an interesting albeit irremediably speculative question, which I cannot adequately address here: does Xenophanean disclosure influence the formation of theological beliefs? The role of observed experience in Xenophanes’ theological methodology is hotly debated, and many scholars ascribe to him aprioristic theological reasoning. Barnes and Mogyoródi, indeed, deny that conjectures based on sense-experience play any part whatsoever.⁸⁷ One could argue that B15 and B16 suggest

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⁸⁶ οὐδὲ μετέρχεσθαι (B26), see e.g. II. V.456, 461.
a suspicious attitude toward naïve, uncritical derivations of theology from our parochial experience of ourselves as other sentient beings. In B26, furthermore, Xenophanes appears to draw inferences from some notion of theological propriety (οὐδὲ ... ἐπιπρέπει).⁸⁸ We may, however, wish to soften the assertion that theology proceeds without any recourse to observed experience. First, positive cosmological propositions can constitute negative theological propositions: Iris (etc) is in fact a cloud (B32, n.b. ἰδέοθαι (cf. εἰσοράασθαι, B36); cf. A43, A38).⁸⁹ Again, in B16 ethnographic observations about the divergent representations of the divine in different cultures inform Xenophanes’ polemic against anthropomorphism. Second, I see no Xenophanean reason to exclude the possibility that observed experience may positively influence our conjectures about unseen gods. For example, cosmic regularities such as the daily generation and quenching of suns (A33, A41) may well have been taken to corroborate the belief that a divine intelligence directs such processes (B25).⁹⁰ Finally, since many of Xenophanes’ theological propositions take the via negativa, the conceptual framework of his theology is intelligible only in reference to those attributes whose ascription to the gods he rejects. The gods, for example, do not wear clothing (B14) or commit adultery (B11f). In this weak but important sense, observed experience is the basic condition of discursive inquiry as such.⁹¹

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⁸⁸ Lesher (1992, p. 112) convincingly rejects Reiche’s attempt (1971, pp. 93–95) to divest the expression of normative connotations.


⁹⁰ Aristotle famously writes that Xenophanes formed the view that ‘the One is (the) god’ (or that ‘(the) god is (the) One’) εἰς τὸν ὅλον οὐρανὸν ἀποβλέψας (Metaph. A.5 986b21–27 = A30). Although the view itself could hardly be Xenophanes’, Aristotle may be reflecting the fact that empirical observation played a role in his theology. Palmer (1998, pp. 5–7) persuasively argues that ‘οὐρανόν’ here signifies, not what Xenophanes referred to when he stated that “the One is (the) god”, but what he considered before arriving at that view.

⁹¹ Gábor Betegh suggests to me yet another possible interpretation of the logic of B18.1, which is also identical with neither the majority nor the minority readings, and which would also take Xenophanes to reject traditional notions of divine disclosure and to supplant them with his own, alternative notion of disclosure as I have reconstructed it here. Perhaps with the prefix ὑπό in the exceptional and pointed term ὑπέδειξαν Xenophanes reflects his own notion of divine disclosure as opposed to traditional notions and not, as I argued above, vice versa. Perhaps ὑπέδειξαν reflects the indirectness which arguably characterises divine disclosure on Xenophanes’ own view: after all, for Xenophanes, as I have reconstructed his position, the divine does not communicate truths to mortals, but rather purposively renders them able to form true beliefs about matters external to their experience by facilitating their discursive engagement with their surroundings.
Many scholars infer that Xenophanes denied disclosure altogether simply from his advocacy of inquiry (B18.2). According to Mogyoródí, for example, the expression ζητοῦντες (as they search or by searching) “explicitly contrasts […] with divine revelation”.⁹² Shorey rightly observes that glosses of ζητοῦντες as “searching by themselves” supply an αὐτοί Xenophanes never used.⁹³ More importantly, the advocacy of temporally protracted inquiries is perfectly consistent with Xenophanes’ notion of divine disclosure, whether one opts for the universal or the particular interpretation of it. But, if the arguments advanced above are accepted, we must also re-evaluate the nature and complexity of Xenophanes’ engagement with traditional paradigms of disclosure, and divination in particular. To that end, we may usefully probe also the widespread assumption that traditional models of divine disclosure necessarily conflict with mortal agency. A consideration of the role of interpretive, conjectural reasoning in Greek divination will undermine the misconception that mantic disclosure typically consisted in the direct transmission of truths to passive mortal recipients.

Disclosure typically consists in the following: the gods, knowing a proposition $p$, which concerns a state-of-affairs that is somehow external to mortal experience, cause the mortal agent to perceive an object or event with the intention that the agent will interpret that object or event to mean, and therefore come to believe, $p$.⁹⁴ The gods, in other words, communicate $p$.⁹⁵ It is, however, up to the diviner to decode the omen correctly. Although we cannot determine to what extent interpretations of divine messages were deduced from systematic exegetic rules, it appears that they typically started from certain basic semiotic principles.

In B18.1, Xenophanes could be stipulating that not even in this indirect manner did the gods disclose to mortals everything from the beginning. Note that this interpretation would not be identical with the minority reading because it takes Xenophanes not simply to restrict the temporal and quantitative scope of divine disclosure but also to qualify the manner of disclosure (ὑπέδειξαν). Now, many of the foregoing observations concerning the language and rhetoric of B18.1, and concerning its apparent relation to other extant fragments and to certain prominent contemporary theological and epistemological attitudes, favour the particular analysis of the line’s logic which I advanced above and according to which the term ὑπέδειξαν signals traditional models of divine disclosure, and this remains on balance my preferred reading. But I can see nothing to exclude conclusively this ingenious alternative suggestion, which would amount to the same overall view of Xenophanes’ epistemology and theology as the one I have defended here.

⁹⁴ For some ways in which $p$ could concern matters external to mortal experience, see above, n. 23.
⁹⁵ Cf. Denyer, above, n. 43.
(e.g. lightning on the right is a favourable sign (II. II.353), a lobeless liver unfavourable) and were further elaborated in light of the nature of the inquiry or circumstances.⁹⁶ Since any mortal interpretation is fallible, divinations were generally regarded as conjectural. Among countless examples that could be cited, the *Iliad* offers a particularly clear one. Calchas infers from the portent of a serpent devouring eight young sparrows and then their mother that the Greeks shall war for as many years and in the tenth take Troy (II. II.303–330).⁹⁷ Odysseus stresses to the Greeks that they all witnessed the omen in question (301f) and urges them to stay in Troy to discover whether or not Calchas divined (i.e. interpreted it) correctly (ἠ ἐτεὸν Κάλχας μαντεύεται ἢ καὶ οὐκὶ, 299f). Here Calchas’ own consultants and supporters represent his divination as a *conjecture*, to be verified only if and when the state of affairs in question comes within the scope of their own experience. In Cicero’s *On Divination*, Quintus reflects much the same view when he replies to the objection that mantic predictions do not invariably come true that the same can be said of any conjectural discipline (*De div. I.14.24*). Although Quintus speaks specifically of omen-divination, the integral and fallible role of mortal exegetic reasoning in the derivation of beliefs from divine disclosure applies no less to oracle divination, a principle analysed by Plato (*Tim*. 72a1ff) and dramatised by Euripides (*Ion* 532ff). Indeed, the same principle underlies (although it could hardly exhaust) Heraclitus’ statement that the lord at Delphi neither says nor conceals but gives a sign (B93).⁹⁸

Indeed, one did not have to be a professional diviner in order to work out what an omen or oracle means. The gods did not necessarily restrict their communications to a handful of chosen individuals, and divination was practicable by any mortal sufficiently informed of the basic semiotic principles who recognised a divine sign as such. Polydamas infers from an eagle flying on the left, carrying a snake which it fails to deliver to its nest, that the Trojans shall likewise make some military advances but fail to finish the task. Though not a diviner,⁹⁹ he avers that

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⁹⁷ For later examples of such mantic exegetic reasoning see e.g. Plutarch, citing the fourth-century Theopompus of Chios, *Dion*. 24; cf. *Timol*. 8.
⁹⁸ For Heraclitus, see further Kahn (1979), pp. 123f. Fontenrose portrays the *historical* Delphic oracle as essentially a Yes / No answering service (1978, see pp. 233–235, countered effectively by Parker 2000, p. 80, with nn.14f), but its cultural representations are anyway at least as pertinent for our investigation. For mortal agency in oracle-interpretation, see further Struck (2005); cf. Johnston (2005), pp. 16f; even lot and dice divination: *De div. I.18.34*; cf. Graf (2005), p. 62.
⁹⁹ II. XIII.730–733 notwithstanding, see Flower (2008, p. 120, n.30) against Billery (2005, pp. 172f).
he interpreted as a diviner would have (II. XII.211–229).¹⁰⁰ Like any discipline such as poetry, medicine or masonry (listed alongside divination as ‘public-crafts’ at Od. XVII.383f), divination could be performed badly or by amateurs.

To be sure, we have seen above (p. 260, with n.45) that diviners also make knowledge claims, however inconsistent that may seem with the general conception of divinations as conjectural.¹⁰¹ Indeed, Calchas as augur is accorded knowledge by both the poet and his characters (II. I.69f, 384f). That diviners also advanced such knowledge claims is perhaps partly due to professional confidence (or confidence in the profession) and self-promotion. Certainly, it might also derive from some notion of divine favour or inspiration. I do not claim that divination always or even usually involved the picturesque allegorical interpretations instantiated by Calchas and Polydamas – indeed, Homeric divination is not invariably inferential¹⁰² – nor do I wish to exclude the elusive notion of inspiring divine guidance from Greek omen-interpretation.¹⁰³ The lay Helen, for example, reasons concerning an omen as the gods inspire her to reason (Od. XV.172ff). The important point for us is the following: from Homer onwards, divination is regularly represented as the active application of fallible human interpretive reasoning to encoded divine communications and not typically as a direct and infallible transmission of truths to passive mortal recipients.¹⁰⁴

Despite their fundamental differences, then, there are also certain continuities between the notions of divine disclosure operative in divination and in Xenophanes’ epistemology. On both accounts, the nature of their interaction with the divine determines the epistemic capacities and limitations of mortals (B34). On both accounts, mortals form beliefs about states-of-affairs external to their experience by applying their reasoning to what the gods disclosed in order (for Xenophanes, among many other things) to endow mortals with the ability

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¹⁰¹ Compare the chorus’ divergent statements about Teiresias as mantis at Soph. OT. 497–501 and OT. 297–299.

¹⁰² At II. VII.44–53, Helenus somehow ‘overhears’ divine deliberations; cf. Theoclymenus’ vision at Od. XX.351–362. Both events are otherwise unparalleled in Homer; Theoclymenus augurs standardly at Od. XV.525–534.

¹⁰³ See the qualified reactions of Flower (2008, pp. 84–90, 26; cf. 37–50, 130 on mantic families) and Dillery (2005, pp. 17ff) to Plato’s (Phdr. 244b6–d5) and Cicero’s (De div. 1.6.11) influential dichotomy between uninspired technical divination (e.g. augury, extispicy) and inspired natural divination (dreams, ecstasy).

¹⁰⁴ Following Vernant (1991); Flower (2008), pp. 13f.
to do so. A case in point: Xenophanes made conjectures about the state of the earth in the distant past and about its future submersion on the basis of marine fossils found inland (A33, A32). Herodotus shows that even here Xenophanes advances on what would fall naturally within the epistemic reach of mantic communication. Onomacritus, he writes, would have succeeded in falsely ascribing to the ancient Musaeus an oracle stating that the islands lying off Lemnos would disappear under the sea had he not been caught red-handed in the act of interpolation (VII.6). Within the framework of his theology, Xenophanes’ conjectures about the earth are in effect propositions about the content of divine volition which will later be realised in states-of-affairs (νόου φρενί, B25; τετελεσμένον, B34). If in B36 Xenophanes was gesturing at the more familiar idea that the gods may guide certain mortal inquirers, the discovery of marine fossils would be a prime candidate for an instance of such disclosure. More probably, however, it is in the sense that a purposive divine intelligence enabled and governed his existence as a perceptive and discursive agent, and determined the scope and content of his experiential repertoire, that Xenophanes would maintain that the fossils he observed, like the honey he tasted, were disclosed for his consideration by the gods.

Rather than messages, then, the gods disclose evidence. Xenophanes advances his conception of divine disclosure against the mantic one, and I by no means wish to downplay the fundamental differences between the two. Although divination did not in general marginalise mortal agency and reasoning, Xenophanes lays revolutionary emphasis on expanding the body of experience on the basis of which we form our conjectures. It is precisely as part of his iconoclastic repudiation of divination that Xenophanes prescribes temporally protracted inquiries as opposed to slicing open cattle or observing birds. Furthermore, if diviners claimed epistemic superiority to all other mortals, on the assumption that it is only on the basis of divine signs that mortals can attain knowledge concerning certain states-of-affairs, Xenophanes most probably made divine disclosure the permanent and fundamental condition of all mortal belief-formation. At the same time, Xenophanes himself manifests an urgent sense of superiority over the authorities, beliefs and values of his contemporaries. Xenophanes’

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105 For a rigorous and sympathetic account of Xenophanes as a serious and critical natural philosopher, see Mourelatos (2008).
106 E.g. II.1.62f, 384f. Xenophon formulates the principle explicitly: Cyrop. I.6.46; Hipp. 9.9.
own sense of superiority most probably derives, I think, from his revolutionary
recognition of the epistemological limitations all mortals share (i.e. of the true
nature of divine disclosure), as well as from a lifetime of inquiry informed by
this recognition. The critical expansion of our experiential repertoire may con-
cclusively falsify a previously held belief (e.g. “figs are the sweetest substance”) or inconclusively justify the formation or retention of conjectures by assessing
them against an ever growing body of experiences (cf. B18.2, B38). Disabused
of what he took to be theological fantasies, and informed of the pitfalls haunt-
ing mortal belief-formation, Xenophanes developed his cosmological, theologi-
cal and socio-moral world-view through many decades of intellectual inquiry
to which he himself bears witness (B8). Conversely, mortals who reason from
divinely encoded messages which are not there, who acquiesce in delusions of
poetic inspiration, or who form beliefs on the basis of their parochial experiential
repertoire blithely and uncritically, are much more liable to go astray.

We may, then, maintain with Cicero (A52) that Xenophanes indeed repudi-
ated the practice and fundamental premisses of divination. Nor does Xenophanes
endorse any modified form of the art of deciphering divine messages. But, by
contrast with the widespread view that he simply eliminated divination and
other traditional paradigms of disclosure without a trace, the Xenophanes
who has emerged from this discussion bears a more complex relation to what
he rejected. In the pivotal case of divine disclosure, certain divinatory supposi-
tions, which Xenophanes rejected, informed the formation of Xenophanean
alternatives, which in turn formed the infrastructure of his own epistemology.
In certain important respects, then, Xenophanes’ relation to “the whole deep-
seated complex of ideas” surrounding divine disclosure was not one of a com-
plete “sweeping-aside” from the very ground (funditus), but of a complex, radical
and subversive appropriation. A longer discussion would do well to explore also
the various social factors that propelled an iconoclast like Xenophanes to engage
with divination in this manner. Xenophanes, after all, was an itinerant sage (B8),
travelling from city to city (B45), counselling on anything from the proper use of
perfume (B3) or wine (B5) to the nature of the gods, using his wisdom (B2.12) to
engender lawfulness and prosperity (B2.19, 22) in the community of the polis as
a whole (πόλις, B2.19, πόλει, 20, πόλιος, 22). He was thus in direct competition

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ciano (2002), pp. 93f. Xenophanes traces the epistemic limitations of mortals to their essential
spatio-temporal limitations. He indicates no exceptions to the principle that ‘belief’ is allotted
to all (ἐπὶ πᾶσι, B34.4), see further Lesher (1992), p. 167; Mogyoródi (2006), p. 150, n.88. B35 appears
to refer to Xenophanes’ own views as instances of belief (δεδοξάσθω).
for the same social and intellectual territory with those itinerant diviners, who would have undoubtedly constituted the most frequent and familiar incarnation of *mantikê* for Xenophanes, and who advised both individuals and whole cities on the gods and any matter public or private, remaining forever outsiders for the communities they counselled.¹⁰⁹ One might also consider that the various types of divination practiced in Greece were rather recent Eastern importations¹¹⁰ and that Xenophanes was haunted by the fall of his Ionian city to ‘the Mede’ (B22) and associated it with the corrupting cultural influence of the East (B3 with Theopompus *apud* Athenaeus XII 526c). Indeed, we saw that Xenophanes both appropriates and radically subverts the notion of mantic disclosure: this is a recurrent pattern in Greek interactions with Eastern paradigms, practices, crafts, and ideas.¹¹¹

‘Philosophy’ and ‘religion’ are and must remain extremely loaded and often problematic categories. Xenophanes’ interaction with traditional paradigms of disclosure, as I have described it, does not preclude the use of some such distinction. Indeed, Xenophanes offers a powerful illustration of a thinker whom later Greek philosophy identified as a philosophical ancestor and whose thought was formed by exposing, criticising, and rejecting deep-seated beliefs and premises central to what we can identify as traditional religion. We would do well, however, to heed Lloyd’s important insight that, when describing the polemical emergence of the ‘philosophical’ from the ‘traditional’, we must never invoke “any talk of a different mentality, a different logic, or a totally different conceptual framework.”¹¹² Xenophanes’ epistemology is, ultimately, no less ‘religious’ than ‘philosophical’ and the two are perfectly compatible.

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¹¹⁰ Burkert (1992), pp. 41–87 (dating the ‘orientalising period’ to 750–650); Flower (2008), pp. 26f (between the eighth and sixth centuries); cf. West (1997), pp. 46–51.


¹¹² Lloyd (1979), pp. 265 and passim.
References


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