

NATURAL THEOLOGY FRAGMENTS

Three beliefs at least would seem to belong to natural religion: (1) There is something more powerful than man; (2) Something more powerful than man has mind and will; and (3) This something more powerful than man which has mind and will is concerned with the lives and actions of men.

From these beliefs follows the reasonableness of prayer and sacrifice. And vice-versa, from the existence of prayer and sacrifice, we can infer the existence of the above three beliefs in those who sincerely pray and sacrifice.

We can distinguish perhaps three stages of natural religion. The first stage is the personification of natural forces. Man recognized his dependence on natural forces (for example, the earth, sun, rain, rivers) and attributed mind and will to these natural forces.

The second stage of natural religion is an anthropomorphic conception of gods separated more or less from natural forces and in control of them. Man recognizes that the natural forces do not have mind and will so he makes these natural forces tools of the gods who have mind and will. However, these gods are imagined to have human form although they are immortal and immensely more powerful and wiser than men. Homer has already advanced to this stage (for example, Zeus is not identified with his thunderbolt but uses it) although there are remnants of the first stage (for example, the river in the *Iliad* which is angry with Achilles).

The third stage of natural religion is the separation of a mind and will more powerful than man from a body in human form. The early Greek philosophers (in particular Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Empedocles and Anaxagoras) take us into this third stage. In this stage, it is also clearly recognized that there is one supreme God although this is also found somewhat in the second stage (for example, Homer's conception of Zeus).

The gods of the poets are based more on the imagination than upon reason. And the philosophers are able to point this out and introduce a more reasonable understanding of the gods or of God.

XENOPHANES

Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods all things that are shameful and blameworthy among men: stealing, adultery and deceiving each other. (Xenophanes, DK 11)

They have uttered for the most part lawless deeds of the gods: stealing, adultery and deceiving each other. (Xenophanes, DK12)

One way in which the philosophers recognized the unreasonable thinking of the poets is in seeing how the poets attributed human faults and wrongdoing to the gods. This is unreasonable whether the poets thought that these actions were acceptable because done by the gods or just because they imagined that the gods were like us in their faults.

But mortals think the gods are born and have their own clothes and voice and body. (Xenophanes, DK 14)

The Ethiopians have gods snub-nosed and black; the Thracians, blue-eyed and with red [hair]. (Xenophanes, DK 16)

But if oxen and horses and lions had hands or could draw with hands and produce the works which men do, horses would draw the forms of the gods like horses and oxen, like oxen, and they would make the bodies such as the bodies which they themselves have. (Xenophanes, DK 15)

Here the anthropomorphic misunderstanding of the gods is attacked by Xenophanes. The poets have not investigated by reason what things greater than us would be, but they have imagined them to be just like us in form. A sign of this is the different ways the Ethiopians and the Thracians represent them. The fact that the Ethiopians give them bodies like Ethiopians in particular have, and the Thracians, bodies like Thracians in particular, is a sign that they have not investigated by reason what these higher beings are in themselves, but they have blindly assimilated them to themselves. The absurdity of this is brought out by the proportion that if the other animals did the same as us, horses would make the gods like horses and oxen, like oxen and so on.

[There is] one god, among gods and men the greatest, neither in body nor in mind like mortals. (Xenophanes, DK 23)

Since reason naturally seeks order and order is based on something one, Xenophanes is reasonably inclined to think that there is one supreme god. But

he also thinks this one highest god is unlike the other gods and men both in body and mind.

The whole sees, the whole thinks, and the whole hears.
(Xenophanes, DK 24)

Xenophanes also reasonably thinks that this highest god, who is the first cause, must be simple or not composed. What we do by different parts in our composed body, the supreme god can do by his one simple nature. The first cause we would reasonably guess to be simple since the simple is a cause of the composed. Hence, both the first natural philosophers and modern physicists seek simplicity in the beginning of things and in their fundamental equations.

He always remains in the same place, being moved in no way, nor is it fitting for him to go away to another place at another time.
(Xenophanes, DK 26)

The changing depends upon something unchanging. Plato and Aristotle were to bring this out fully. Change cannot be understood without something that remains the same. The first natural philosophers thought that the first matter was eternal. The modern physicist bases all his understanding upon the conservation laws.

But without any work, he swayeth all things by the thought of [his] mind. (Xenophanes, DK 25)

Even in human society, we see that the greatest changes are the result of the thinking of one man or of a few men, percolating down to others.

HERACLITUS

If they did not make solemn procession and sing the shameful phallic hymn to Dionysus, their deeds would be most shameful. But Hades is the same as Dionysus for whom they rave and have Bacchic revels. (Heraclitus, DK 15)

Night-walkers, magicians, followers of Bacchus, and initiates into the mysteries - the things after death threaten these, to these fire prophesies: the mysteries practiced by men are unholy mysteries. (Heraclitus, DK 14)

Like Xenophanes, Heraclitus sees how unreasonable it is to do bad things in honor and imitation of the gods. In the first of these fragments, Heraclitus expresses himself ironically: these things would be shameful if we did not have the gods in mind in doing them.

They purify themselves, staining themselves with other blood as if someone stepping into the mud should try to wash himself free from mud. He would seem to be mad if any man should observe him acting thus. And they pray to these statues as if someone were to chat with houses, not knowing what gods and heroes are. (Heraclitus, DK 5)

Here Heraclitus attacks other irrational things done in honor of the gods and the unreasonable praying to our own artifacts which are, of course, inferior to us.

It is fitting that Homer be thrown out of the contest and trashed, and Archilochus likewise. (Heraclitus, DK 42)

Most Greeks admired the poets like Homer and regarded them as wise and the teachers of the Greeks. But Heraclitus here speaks of what they deserve for propagating these absurd images of the gods.

Of all whose discourse I have heard, none has come so far as to know that the wise is set apart from all things. (Heraclitus, DK 108)

The wise is one only. It is willing and unwilling to be called by the name of Zeus. (Heraclitus, DK 32)

Heraclitus thinks that there is one who is wise by *antonomasia*, one only and distinct from all other things. Again, this is reasonable because reason naturally looks for order and order is based on something one. And that this one is *wise* is also reasonable for it belongs to the wise to order. Hence, the culmination of Aristotle's six-part description of the wise man in the beginning of the *Metaphysics* is that he orders others. And this is reasonable since wisdom is the highest perfection of reason of which it is proper to look for order. Reason is the ability for large discourse, looking before and after; and before and after is what order is. This wise one could be called Zeus if the poets had not abused the name.

Human nature does not have judgment, but the divine has.
(Heraclitus, DK 78)

Man is not able by his nature to judge between the true and the false and between the good and the bad. His ability to judge is acquired. He judges imperfectly by his senses and by the common. But the divine is simple as Xenophanes also thought so that by its nature it has judgment.

The most beautiful ape is ugly compared to the genus of men. The wisest of men towards God appears an ape, in wisdom and beauty and all other things.
(Heraclitus, DK 82-83)

A man is called childish compared to God; just as a boy, in comparison to a man. (Heraclitus, DK 79)

In these two magisterial proportions, Heraclitus helps us to understand by likeness how man is towards God in wisdom and other things. The modern biologist calls man the wise ape (*homo sapiens*) because in comparison to the ape, man is wise. But Pythagoras said "don't call me wise; God alone is wise." In comparison to God, man is not wise. Hence, as the ape is to man so is man to God. Likewise, a man seems wise to a child, but compared to God, a man does not seem wise. Hence, as a child is to man so is man to God. This is why man must learn from God, just as a child must learn from the man. The child first learns from the man by imitating him. And this is also the way in which man first learns from God which is by imitating His works, natural things. Later the child learns more perfectly from the words of the man. Has God also spoken to us so that we might learn from His words in a more perfect way? The philosophers learned from God through natural things, but perhaps (if God has spoken to us or some men) there is another later way of learning from God through His words.

Wisdom is one thing. It is to understand the mind by which all things are steered through all things. (Heraclitus, DK 41)

Here Heraclitus speaks of what wisdom would be even for us. It is not a heap of many kinds of knowledge, but the knowledge of one thing. This is to know "the mind by which all things are steered through all things".

How could one hide from what never sets? (Heraclitus, DK 16)

The sun is sometimes metaphorically called the "eye of heaven". As Shakespeare says in the Sonnets: *sometimes too hot the eye of heaven doth*

shine. But if we apply this *eye of heaven* metaphorically to God's mind, it is a sun that never sets. Unlike our mind which is only sometimes in act, the divine mind is always in act and all things are seen by it. Hence, we are being urged by Heraclitus to be good since we cannot escape being seen by the divine mind. Boethius ends the *Consolation of Philosophy* with a similar observation

EMPEDOCLES

It is not possible to draw God near within easy reach of our eyes or to take hold of him with our hands which is the broadest road of persuasion that leads into the mind of man. (Empedocles, DK 133)

Empedocles speaks of the difficulty of knowing God for our mind which follows the road from the senses into reason. We cannot judge the nature of God by what we can sense. He mentions the sense of sight and the sense of touch in particular. The sense of sight is the clearest of the senses and the sense of touch the most certain. And only these two senses know form.

For he is not furnished with a human head on a body, nor do two branches shoot from a back, nor feet, nor swift knees, nor hairy parts; but he is holy and inexpressible mind alone, darting through all things in the universe with swift thoughts. (Empedocles, DK 134)

Empedocles also rejects the anthropomorphic images of God in the poets. And following Heraclitus and Xenophanes, he thinks of God as a mind, going though the universe, not as a body does, but with his thoughts.

ANAXAGORAS

Other things have a part of everything, but mind is unlimited and self-ruling and is mixed with nothing, but is itself alone by itself. For if it were not by itself, but were mixed with something other, it would have a share of all things if it were mixed with any; for there is a part of everything in everything, as has been said by me in what goes before. And the things mixed with it would hinder it, so that it would rule over nothing like it does being alone by itself.

For it is the thinnest of all things and the purest, and it has all knowledge about everything and has the greatest power. And mind rules all things which have life, both the greater and the lesser. And mind ruled over the whole revolution, so that it began to revolve in the beginning. And first it began to revolve from something small, but now it revolves over a greater distance, and it will revolve over more. And mind knows all the things mixed together and those separated off, and those divided. And mind set in order all things that were to be, and all things that were but now are not, and whatever is now and whatever things will be, and this revolution in which the stars and the sun and the moon and the air and the aether go round, having been separated off. This revolution has caused them to be separated. The thick is separated from the thin, and the warm from the cold, and the bright from the dark, and the dry from the moist. There are many parts of many things. Nothing is separated off nor divided entirely the one from the other, except mind.

Every mind is similar, both the greater and the lesser. Nothing else is like anything else, but each thing is and was most clearly those things of which it has the most. (Anaxagoras, DK 12)

This is the great fragment on the mind by Anaxagoras. Since "Every mind is similar, both the greater and the lesser", what is said here about the greater mind can be understood somewhat through our own mind. And some things said about mind here are applicable to both the greater and the lesser mind proportionally. A full exposition of this fragment is given in the consideration of it among the natural fragments. But what is said here of the greater mind is a stepping-stone to understanding God.

Although the greater mind of Anaxagoras is responsible for the distinction of the parts of the natural world and their order, it is not responsible for the existence of matter. Anaxagoras has not yet arrived at a God who creates.

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