



How did Xenophanes Become an Eleatic Philosopher?

Mathilde Brémond

► To cite this version:

Mathilde Brémond. How did Xenophanes Become an Eleatic Philosopher?. *Elenchos Journal of Studies on Ancient Thought*, 2020, 41 (1), pp.1 - 26. 10.1515/elen-2020-0001 . hal-04493462

HAL Id: hal-04493462

<https://hal.science/hal-04493462>

Submitted on 7 Mar 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Mathilde Brémond*

How did Xenophanes Become an Eleatic Philosopher?

<https://doi.org/10.1515/elen-2020-0001>

Abstract: In this paper, I investigate how Xenophanes was ‘eleaticised’, i.e. attributed theses and arguments that belong to Parmenides and Melissus. I examine texts of Plato, Aristotle and Theophrastus in order to determine if they considered Xenophanes as a philosopher and a monist. I show that neither Plato nor Aristotle regarded him as a philosopher, but rather as a pantheist poet who claimed, in a vague way, that everything is one. But Theophrastus interpreted too literally Aristotle’s claims and was the first to make Xenophanes a proper monist philosopher.

Keywords: Xenophanes, eleatism, reception, doxography

Our oldest testimonies¹ on Xenophanes assert that he was Parmenides’s master and shared some of his doctrine. The idea that Parmenides would have inherited some concepts from Xenophanes is still quite common.² The usual story consists in saying that Xenophanes thought that God is one, eternal and unmoved/unchanged, and that his pupil Parmenides took over these predicates and applied them to being in general.

However, the opposite phenomenon took place in the ancient tradition: theses and arguments that belonged to the Eleatics (i.e. mostly Parmenides and his follower Melissus) were retrospectively attributed to Xenophanes. Critics usually call this phenomenon the ‘eleatisation’ of Xenophanes.³ It consists in three aspects, each of which goes further in assimilating Xenophanes and the Eleatics:

1 I leave aside in this paper Heraclitus’s testimony on Xenophanes (B40), since he does not provide much information and could not, of course, compare Xenophanes with Parmenides.

2 See for example Palmer (2009) 329–331: even though he acknowledges that “Parmenides’ vision of What Is seems to be of an altogether different order than Xenophanes’ conception of the greatest God”, he still claims that “it would seem perverse not to admit that Xenophanes influenced Parmenides in some way” (330).

3 Cf. Mansfeld (1987) 301. One usually understands with “eleatism” a doctrine shared by Parmenides and Melissus (and eventually Zeno) according to which being is one, eternal and unmoved. This unified conception of eleatism is itself a doxographical reconstruction: see Brémond (2017) 37–48.

*Corresponding author: Mathilde Brémond, PHIER, Université Clermont-Auvergne, France; Centre Léon Robin, Paris, France, E-mail: bremondmathilde@gmail.com

- Xenophanes’s God is identified with the one being.⁴
- He receives most of the predicates of Parmenides’s being.⁵
- Xenophanes is assigned arguments that belong to Parmenides or Melissus.

I will illustrate this eleatisation with an example. It is well documented that for Xenophanes, gods are eternal, i.e. not only immortal, but also unborn.⁶ Aristotle attributes him the following argument:

T1. Xenophanes said that those who pretend that gods came to be are as impious as those who say that they die: for in both cases, it follows that once there were no gods (*Rh.* II 23.1399b6–9 = DK A12/Xen. 11).⁷

According to this text, gods must be eternal because it would be impious to claim that there was a time when there were no gods. Although none of our fragments confirms that Xenophanes used such an argument, Aristotle’s testimony is probably trustworthy: for Xenophanes is known to criticise the poets’ conception of gods, and this argument implicitly attacks them for depicting the gods as immortal but born.

Let us now compare this text with the one of Pseudo-Plutarch’s *Stromata* (which is quoted by Eusebius):

T2. Xenophanes of Colophon follows his own way, which changed everything that had been said before, and accepts neither coming to be nor perishing, but he says that the whole is always alike. For if it came to be, he says, necessarily it would not have been before. And not-being could not come to be nor could it create something nor would something come to be from not-being (*Praep. evang.* 1.8.4 = Xen. 162).

Pseudo-Plutarch not only attributes to Xenophanes ontological statements about the eternity of the whole (τὸ πᾶν), but he also presents an argument according to which nothing can come to be from not-being. This argument is extremely similar to Melissus’s fragment B1,⁸ since it deduces the impossibility of generation from

⁴ We find such an explicit statement for example in Cicero’s *Luc.* 118 (= A34/Xen. 42): “Xenophanes, who is a bit more ancient, says that everything (*omnia*) is one and cannot change, and that it is God.”

⁵ See for example Simplicius *In Phys.* 28.4–8 (= Xen. 230): “Leucippus [...] did not follow the same way as Parmenides and Xenophanes about beings, but the opposite one, as it seems. For while they made the whole one, unmoved, ungenerated and limited, and agreed not to even look for not-being, he...”

⁶ See fragment B14, where Xenophanes criticises the mortals for claiming that gods are born.

⁷ I will systematically give the correspondence with the Diels and Kranz (1951) and Strobel and Wöhrle (2018) editions for the testimonies.

⁸ “What was always was and always will be. For if it came to be, necessarily there is nothing before it came to be. Then if there was nothing, nothing could ever come to be from nothing.”

two premises: 1) if being came to be, there would be nothing before it, and 2) nothing can come to be from nothing.⁹

One can only wonder how such an extreme rewriting of Xenophanes happened. It is commonly noticed that this eleatisation started very early: Plato and Aristotle already closely associate Parmenides and Xenophanes.¹⁰ They do not go so far, however, as to claim that Xenophanes's God had exactly the same characteristics as Parmenides's being or attribute him Eleatic arguments. There is debate, however, as to whether or not they already assimilated his God with being, and how important they considered the similarities between Xenophanes and Parmenides to be.

In view of this attribution of Eleatic theses and arguments to Xenophanes, it is almost universally admitted that Xenophanes was eleaticised.¹¹ There is no agreement, however, on two questions: when Xenophanes started to be eleaticised, i.e. to be interpreted as a monist philosopher, and why this eleatisation happened.

The answer to the first question is mostly connected to the opposition between poetry and philosophy:¹² while everyone acknowledges that Plato already associated Xenophanes and Parmenides, some critics think that he really considered Xenophanes as some kind of monist philosopher, but most of them rather claim that he regarded him as a poet, not a philosopher. The same issue can be raised concerning Aristotle and Theophrastus. Thus, Gemelli Marciano (2005) 119 claims that Plato does not regard Xenophanes as a philosopher at all and Aristotle and Theophrastus hardly do, since they exclude him from the philosophers of nature; only later doxography, starting with Timon, would have read him as a

⁹ Pseudo-Aristotle employs a similar argument in *On Melissus, Xenophanes and Gorgias* (3.977a14–23 = Xen. 15) to prove the eternity of Xenophanes's God. He notes, however, that this argument does not just apply to God but also to any being, and he criticises Xenophanes on this point (4.977b24–26).

¹⁰ Cf. Mansfeld (1987) 302: “the detailed and specific doctrine of Parmenides came to be imposed upon the after all rather elastic innuendos of Xenophanes, and did so at an early date.”

¹¹ Critics who regarded as authentic the Parmenidean arguments and theses the ancients attribute to Xenophanes, especially in the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *On Melissus, Xenophanes and Gorgias*, had to suppose that Xenophanes either was a disciple of Parmenides rather than the other way around (Reinhardt 1916, 100–112), or that at least he wrote his theology later in his life, under the influence of Parmenides (Gigon 1945, 194–195). These interpretations are widely rejected nowadays for naively trusting eleaticised testimonies.

¹² This distinction covers the Greek opposition between *mythos* and *logos*, or the Aristotelian one between theologians (like Hesiod) and philosophers. From this point, I will use the terms ‘poet’ and ‘poetry’ as referring to the first group of people, even though, of course, many Presocratic philosophers were also poets. The ‘poets’ can be defined as people who present a worldview that is not supported by arguments, but relies on tradition and myths.

philosopher.¹³ By contrast, Finkelberg (1990) 111 n. 8 rejects the idea that Plato (and anyone after him) did not earnestly attribute philosophical monism to Xenophanes. Many critics adopt an intermediate reading: Plato would have associated Xenophanes and Parmenides without serious thought, but Aristotle, followed by Theophrastus, misinterpreted him and considered this connection as significant.¹⁴ Others give a more intermediary role to Aristotle: he would have been reluctant, and Theophrastus would have turned his hesitation into certainty.¹⁵

Mansfeld (1986) antedates this phenomenon by claiming that Plato and Aristotle inherited sophistic catalogues. These catalogues would classify thinkers depending on their opinion on the number of beings and whether they moved or not. Xenophanes would have been labelled as someone who thinks that there is one unmoved being. Mansfeld attributes the catalogue that would have inspired Plato in the *Sophist* (see T3 below) to Hippias (26–27) who, according to him, listed both poets and philosophers.¹⁶ He does not pronounce himself, however, on which category Xenophanes would belong to.

The second issue concerns the causes of this eleatisation. Some think that Xenophanes indeed inspired Parmenides or had enough in common with him to justify the connection. The closer one brings them, the weaker the eleatisation appears. The most strikingly assimilationist reading is Finkelberg's: he assumes that Xenophanes not only was a monist, but also attributed his God predicates and used deductive arguments that Parmenides inherited.¹⁷ In this case, Xenophanes's eleatisation would be minimal, since he would share a lot with Parmenides: the main difference would be that he applied his reasoning to God, not to being. Since we find no such deductive arguments and not so many predicates of God in our fragments,¹⁸ Finkelberg must rely for his interpretation on the doxographies, among which my text T2. The extreme resemblance of their content with Eleatic arguments makes it clear, however, that such texts rather present an eleaticised Xenophanes than a trustworthy account of his reasoning: even Finkelberg has to

¹³ Lanza (2005) 105–109 has a similar approach, although he mostly insists on Plato's and Aristotle's lack of interest in Xenophanes. See also Guthrie (1962) 369.

¹⁴ See for example Cherniss (1935) 201 n. 228, and 353, McDiarmid (1953) 119–120, Barnes (1982) 64 and Kirk, Raven, and Schofield (1983) 165.

¹⁵ See McDiarmid (1953) 118–119 and Stokes (1971) 83–84.

¹⁶ He notes, however, that Plato does not mention movement when he discusses the Eleatics (Mansfeld 1986, 27).

¹⁷ Finkelberg (1990) 155–157.

¹⁸ Xenophanes describes his God as one (B23), eternal (B14), all-perceiving (B24) and unmoved (B26). Doxographies add that he was limited, and even spherical, and homogenous – predicates that rather belong to Parmenides's being. See for example Hippolytus, *Haer.* 1.14.2 (= A33/Xen. 119).

admit that some aspects, in particular the assimilation of being and God, are not genuine.

Most critics think that the resemblance between Xenophanes and Parmenides is much more superficial. Two elements are usually highlighted: the unity and immobility of Xenophanes's God, which would echo the unity and immobility of Parmenides's being.¹⁹ Both aspects are problematic, however. For, on the one hand, it is quite certain, thanks to fragment B26, that Xenophanes's God is unmoved;²⁰ but, as we will see, neither Plato nor Aristotle mention the absence of movement in their discussion of Xenophanes, but only unity. On the other hand, although Xenophanes clearly puts one God in the spotlight, it is extremely debated whether he was a monotheist: our only fragment on this matter, which Clement of Alexandria quotes, is variously interpreted.²¹ Xenophanes regularly mentions a plurality of gods,²² but the supporters of the monotheistic interpretation take it that it only happens when he criticises the poets. I will not enter this debate here, even though it seems to me that the contenders of a henotheistic interpretation – with many gods that would exist under the dominion of a superior one – have a stronger case. The important issue for this paper is whether our first testimonies depicted him as a monotheist. Plato is unclear on this matter but, as it appears, Aristotle does not consider Xenophanes as a monotheist, since he attributes him some positive claims about the gods.²³ If Aristotle (and probably Plato too) does not think that Xenophanes is a monotheist, it is not so evident, then, to understand what resemblance he saw between his thought and Parmenides's monistic ontology: he could not draw a parallel between the one God of Xenophanes and the one being of Parmenides.

Another way to explain this eleatisation consists in saying that Xenophanes was associated with Parmenides for historical reasons: he spent some time in Elea, might have known Parmenides and was, correctly or not, considered as his master. As a consequence, the Ancients would have supposed that his doctrine was similar

19 See for example Mansfeld (1987) 302–303 and McKirahan (2010) 58 n. 2. For a longer list of similarities between Xenophanes and Parmenides, see Stokes (1971) 82–83.

20 “He always remains in the same place without moving at all, / and it does not suit him to wander at different moments in different places.”

21 B23: εἷς θεός, ἔν τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνθρώποισι μέγιστος, οὗτι δέμας θνητοῖσιν ὁμοίος οὐδὲ νόημα, “one God, the greatest among gods and men, / similar to mortals neither in shape nor in thought”. The fragment has been much discussed and opposite conclusions have been drawn from it, depending on how one understands εἷς (as reinforcing the superlative or referring to the unity of God?) and ἔν τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνθρώποισι (simple polar expression or evidence of polytheism?). See the discussion in Stokes (1971) 76–79, Barnes (1982) 68–69 and Schäfer (1996) 164–166.

22 Fragments B11–16.

23 Cf. T1 and *Poet.* 25.1460b35–1461a1 (= Xen. 9).

to Parmenides's. This justification appears to be weak, however, especially as far as our first testimonies are concerned: while it became common, in later Antiquity, to reconstruct systematic schools of thought and to assimilate the doctrine of all their members,²⁴ we find no evidence of such a tendency in Plato or Aristotle. Even though this historical connection may have helped associate Xenophanes and Parmenides, it cannot by itself justify the eleatisation.

Indeed, critics often combine the different explanations: doctrinal similarity, with eventually a reference to sophistic catalogues, and historical link with Elea.²⁵ Most of them, unfortunately, evoke this topic quite quickly, within an article dedicated to Xenophanes in general, and do not therefore devote a proper investigation to this issue. More dangerously, they often study the testimonies of Plato and Aristotle in order to find some elements that would confirm their own interpretation of Xenophanes, and their reading is therefore biased. Hence, Finkelberg (1990) thinks that Plato and Aristotle regarded Xenophanes as a monist philosopher because he takes Xenophanes to be a monist philosopher. By contrast, Gemelli Marciano (2005) and Lanza (2005) claim that he was considered as a poet with some loose connection with Parmenides because they themselves argue that he was no philosopher. In this paper, I aim to study these texts without preconceptions about what Xenophanes was or claimed: our first testimonies are themselves interpreting his thought, and we should not read them to look for evidence for our own conception of Xenophanes, but to understand the history of his reception, and in particular how he came to be interpreted as an Eleatic.

I will study the texts of Plato and Aristotle together, because they contain obvious similarities that can make us assume that they had roughly the same interpretation. And since Plato's account is quite short, Aristotle's can help understand it.

Plato mentions Xenophanes only once, in the *Sophist*, when he examines how many beings his predecessors identified in what he disdainfully calls 'their myths':

T3. Τὸ δὲ παρ' ἡμῶν²⁶ Ἑλεατικὸν ἔθνος, ἀπὸ Ξενοφάνους τε καὶ ἔτι πρόσθεν ἀρξάμενον, ὡς ἐνὸς ὄντος τῶν πάντων καλουμένων οὕτω διεξέρχεται τοῖς μύθοις.

Our Eleatic tribe, starting from Xenophanes and even earlier, talks in its myths as if what we call 'everything' were one (*Soph.* 242d = A29/Xen. 3).

²⁴ One of these schools will indeed be identified as the Eleatic one, with Xenophanes at its head: see for example Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* 1.14.62.2 (= Xen. 114). The Eleatic school was sometimes merged into a larger Italic school that would start with Pythagoras, for example in Diogenes Laertius I 15 (= Xen. 135).

²⁵ See for example Chrysakopoulou (2017) 169–171.

²⁶ Some manuscripts have ἡμῖν, but recent critics tend to prefer ἡμῶν, which is more attested. Cf. Palmer (1998) 1 n. 1.

Aristotle, even though he mentions Xenophanes a couple of times, only connects him with the Eleatics in *Metaphysics* A 5, when he studies his predecessors' principles. He first blames the Eleatics for claiming that the principle is one and unmoved, on the ground that their principle does not cause anything and is therefore no principle. He then says that they still present an interest for his theory of the four causes inasmuch as Parmenides would regard being's unity as formal and Melissus as material. He then turns to Xenophanes:

T4. Ξενοφάνης δὲ πρῶτος τούτων ένίσας (ὁ γάρ Παρμενίδης τούτου λέγεται γενέσθαι μαθητής) οὐθέν διεσαφήνισεν, οὐδὲ τῆς φύσεως τούτων οὐδετέρας ἔοικε θιγεῖν, ἀλλ' εἰς τὸν ὅλον οὐρανὸν ἀποβλέψας τὸ έν εἶναί φησι τὸν θεόν. οὗτοι μὲν οὖν, καθάπερ εἴπομεν, ἀφετέοι πρὸς τὴν νῦν ζήτησιν, οἱ μὲν δύο καὶ πάμπαν ὡς ὄντες μικρὸν ἀγροικότεροι, Ξενοφάνης καὶ Μέλισσος. Παρμενίδης δὲ μᾶλλον βλέπων ἔοικέ που λέγειν.

But Xenophanes, the first among them to 'unicise'²⁷ (for Parmenides is said to have been his pupil), made nothing clear and does not seem to have grasped the nature of either of them [i.e. the formal and material cause]. But looking at the whole universe, he says that the one is God.²⁸ These [thinkers], as we have said, should be set aside for our present inquiry, two of them completely because they are a bit cruder, i.e. Xenophanes and Melissus. But Parmenides seems to speak with somehow more insight. (*Metaph.* A 5.986b21–28 = A30/Xen. 7)

My presentation will be structured as follows: I will first examine the historical elements Plato and Aristotle provide, then the doctrine they attribute to Xenophanes, and finally, I will take into consideration some elements of context and parallel passages in order to establish what status Plato and Aristotle gave to Xenophanes's claim.

1. Plato describes Xenophanes as the starting-point of the "Eleatic tribe". However, by the time of Plato, the word 'Eleatic' did not refer to the supporters of a set of doctrines without any geographical connotation, as it does now – we often call Melissus an Eleatic although he came from Samos, because he was a follower of Parmenides. At the beginning of the dialogue, Plato associates Elea with the philosophers who live there, i.e. Parmenides and Zeno.²⁹ It appears then that Elea is for Plato both a place and a specific philosophical circle. Therefore, he connects Xenophanes both with the city of Elea and with the philosophers in it.

²⁷ The term ένίζειν is a neologism, I translate it accordingly.

²⁸ I will discuss various aspects of this translation in my analysis.

²⁹ Plato presents the main character of his dialogue as follows: "his kind comes from Elea, and he is a companion of Parmenides's and Zeno's circle" (216a: τὸ μὲν γένος ἐξ Ἐλέας, ἐταῖρον δὲ τῶν ἀμφὶ Παρμενίδην καὶ Ζήνωνα). The text is translated differently if one follows the version of other manuscripts that have ἕτερον instead of ἐταῖρον: "he is different from the people of Parmenides's and Zeno's circle".

In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle also links Xenophanes to Elea by narrating a conversation he would have had with the inhabitants of this city:³⁰ as a consequence, he also claims that Xenophanes spent some time in Elea. In the *Metaphysics*, however, he goes further than Plato by saying that Xenophanes was ‘supposedly’ Parmenides’s teacher. The exact meaning of λέγεται is disputed, depending on whether critics want to confirm this historical connection with Parmenides or reject it: it could indicate that Aristotle heard it from a trustworthy source, that he is not sure about it, or even that he is actually referring to Plato’s own statement and interpreting it as meaning that Xenophanes was Parmenides’s teacher.³¹ It is difficult, and not decisive for my purpose, to decide between these different approaches. Evidently, Aristotle could not have any direct knowledge of the historical relationship between Xenophanes and Parmenides, and had to obtain this information from some source, which explains the λέγεται. Whether this source is trustworthy or not, Plato or someone else, is not my object:³² I only wish to emphasise that Aristotle, like Plato, connects Xenophanes and Parmenides for historical reasons.³³

2. This historical relationship between Xenophanes and Parmenides seems, as already said, no reason enough to assimilate their thought.³⁴ Plato and Aristotle indeed compare their doctrine on one specific point: they both spoke about the unity of everything.³⁵ One must note, however, that they are very cautious and even vague in their description of Xenophanes’s doctrine. Plato expresses himself in a rather contorted way: the Eleatics would “talk in [their] myths as if what we call ‘everything’ were one”. This formulation contrasts with the much more straightforward way in which he describes the thought of the other thinkers who had an opinion on the number of beings: he then employs a simple verb of enunciation

30 *Rh.* II 23.1400b5–8 = A13/Xen. 12.

31 For a reading of λέγεται as indicating some caution, see Guthrie (1962) 369, Stokes (1971) 83 and 289 n. 55; for the possibility of Aristotle resting on Plato, see Ross (1924) 154, McDiarmid (1953) 119, Kirk, Raven, and Schofield (1983) 165 and Palmer (1998) 2. Mansfeld (1986) 15 criticises this second reading because Plato does not specifically say that Parmenides was Xenophanes’s pupil. Finkelberg (1990) 105 n. 8 argues at length that Aristotle does not use λέγεται to indicate some doubt about his sources.

32 It is clear from the anecdote reported in the *Rhetoric* (n. 30) that Aristotle had access to information on the historical Xenophanes that exceeds the one in Plato’s *Sophist*.

33 See Cerri (2000), who examines all the testimonies connecting Xenophanes with Elea and argues that they have a historical basis.

34 Cf. Finkelberg (1990) 105–106, even though I disagree with his claim that Plato, contrarily to Aristotle, confuses historical connection and doctrinal agreement.

35 I therefore disagree with those who think that the immobility of Xenophanes’s God came into play – either with unity, as for example Kirk, Raven, and Schofield (1983) 165 claim, or by itself, as McDiarmid (1953) 119 says. Neither Plato nor Aristotle mention the fact that Xenophanes’s God is unmoved. Cf. Mansfeld (1986) 27.

with ὥς and a completive clause.³⁶ As for Aristotle, he even seems to invent a new verb, ἐνίζειν, whose meaning is as a consequence quite vague.³⁷ He also blames Xenophanes for his lack of clarity.³⁸ Therefore, it appears that either they are not sure of what Xenophanes thought, or they consider his doctrine itself as unclear.³⁹

What do they mean when they say that Xenophanes is a supporter of the unity of everything? Plato does not provide any details, we must therefore turn to Aristotle for some clues. He describes Xenophanes's thesis as follows: "looking at the whole universe, he says that the one is God". This sentence raises several problems of interpretation, which are discussed in detail by Palmer (1998) 4–7. Two aspects are relatively consensual: first, that οὐρανός means 'universe' rather than 'heavens';⁴⁰ second, that one should read τὸ ἓν as the subject and τὸν θεόν as the predicate, i.e. "the one is God" rather than "God is the one".⁴¹ There is a debate, however, on whether the syntagma "looking at the whole universe" is a reference to Xenophanes's reason for believing that the one is God or indicates the object Xenophanes describes when saying that the one is God, i.e. whether Aristotle assimilates the universe with God or not.⁴² How could the universe be the reason why Xenophanes thinks that the one is God without being equivalent to God? Critics who support this reading claim that according to Aristotle, Xenophanes observed the movements of the sky and deduced that they must be caused by one God.⁴³ It is hard to understand, however, why Xenophanes would have drawn God's unity from the observation of these movements: he could eventually postulate the existence of a godly mover, but not that it had to be one. Moreover,

36 See for example the description of Empedocles's thought, which is reported just after the Eleatics': λέγειν ὥς τὸ ὄν πολλά τε καὶ ἓν ἐστίν.

37 This verb appears nowhere in Greek literature before this text.

38 There are two ways to read οὐθὲν διεσαφήνισεν: either as referring specifically to the point Aristotle is discussing, i.e. whether Xenophanes's unity is formal or material (see Finkelberg 1990, 106, Palmer 1998, 4 and Ross 1924, 154), or as meaning that Xenophanes is unclear in absolute (this seems to be the reading of Kirk, Raven, and Schofield 1983, 171). I think that the pronoun οὐθὲν ("he made *nothing* clear") rather points to the second interpretation, and that the following sentence applies this lack of clarity to the issue of the material or formal nature of unity.

39 On what it means for a doctrine to be unclear, see n. 60.

40 Cf. Ross (1924) 154 and Palmer (1998) 6. This is the third meaning of οὐρανός according to Aristotle *Cael.* I 9.278b9–21. This interpretation is justified by Aristotle's adjunction of the adjective ὅλον.

41 This is justified by the position of τὸ ἓν, its article, and the fact that Aristotle is discussing in this text what kind of unity the Eleatics conceived: his focus is rather on the nature of unity than on the characteristics of Xenophanes's principle.

42 Most critics opt for the second reading. See for the first one, however, Steinmetz (1966) 47–48, Palmer (1998) 5–6 and McKirahan (2010) 63 n. 14. Palmer admits a bit later (7), however, that Aristotle identifies the world and the one God.

43 See Palmer (1998) 7.

and more importantly, if Aristotle considered this God as a moving cause, he would not pretend that Xenophanes was unclear as to which cause his unity relates to. Therefore, one should rather understand that Aristotle identifies the world with the unity that is God. This also allows us to interpret Plato's clause "what we call 'everything' [is] one" as meaning "the universe is one". Hence, both Aristotle and Plato attribute to Xenophanes the thesis that there is unity in the universe, and Aristotle more specifically identifies this unity with Xenophanes's God. We may call this doctrine 'pantheism'.⁴⁴

Many critics reject this assimilation of God with the universe.⁴⁵ The main argument consists in referring to fragment B25 according to which God "shakes everything with his mind" (νόου φρενὶ πάντα κραδαίνει). This text raises two difficulties for the pantheist interpretation: first, God is unmoved but the world is moved, and second, God must be different from the world in order to move it.⁴⁶ None of these difficulties seems insuperable: one could distinguish between the world as a whole, which would be unmoved and equivalent to God, and the things within the world, which could be moved by God. In any case, as already noted, my aim in this paper is to understand what Xenophanes's doctrine was *according to Aristotle and Plato*, not in absolute.⁴⁷

Another of our early testimonies attributes some kind of pantheism to Xenophanes, i.e. Timon of Phleius's. This Pyrrhonist philosopher from the third century BC is the author of *Silloi*, in which he criticises dogmatic philosophers. According to Diogenes Laertius,⁴⁸ two of the *Silloi*'s three books consisted in a dialogue with Xenophanes.⁴⁹ The sceptical character of some of Xenophanes's verses (B34–36) probably explains Timon's choice: he might have considered him as a proto-Pyrrhonist.⁵⁰ Since it is reasonable to assume that Timon read the poem(s) of his main character, he is usually considered as an independent

44 See Schirren (2013) 349–350 for a discussion of how one should understand 'pantheism' in the case of Xenophanes.

45 See for example Gigon (1945) 184 and McKirahan (2010) 63 n. 14.

46 See Kirk, Raven, and Schofield (1983) 172.

47 Cf. McDiarmid (1953) 119, Kirk, Raven, and Schofield (1983) 172 and Schäfer (1996) 183–184, who claim that Aristotle indeed assimilates Xenophanes's God and the world, but wrongly.

48 Diog. Laert. IX 111 = Xen. 149.

49 On the structure of the *Silloi* and Xenophanes's role in it, see Clayman (2009) 78–94.

50 Cf. *ibid.* 140–141. On the sceptical interpretative tradition of Xenophanes, see Vassallo (2015), especially his table p. 173.

source.⁵¹ In fragment 59 Di Marco (= A35/Xen. 90), he criticises Xenophanes for not having doubted everything, but for having kept a dogmatic position on one point. He puts the following speech in Xenophanes's mouth:

T5. Ὡς καὶ ἐγὼν ὄφελον πυκινοῦ νόου ἀντιβολῆσαι ἀμφοτερόβλεπτος· δολίῃ δ' ὁδῷ ἐξαπατήθην πρεσβυγενὴς ἔτ' ἐὼν καὶ ἀμενθήριςτος ἀπάσης σκεπτοσύνης. ὅππῃ γὰρ ἐμὸν νόον εἰρύσαιμι, εἰς ἓν ταῦτό τε πᾶν ἀνελύετο· πᾶν δ' ἐὼν αἰεὶ πάντῃ ἀνεκλόμενον μίαν εἰς φύσιν ἴσταθ' ὁμοίην.

How I wish I had gotten a share of a solid mind too, and always looked both ways! But I was deceived by a treacherous path, because I was already old and did not worry about every doubt. For wherever I extended my mind, everything was dissolving into the same unity, and every being, even though it was dragged in every direction, always stabilised in one homogenous nature.⁵²

Timon does not explicitly mention God in this text, but it is hardly doubtful that the “one homogenous nature” should be identified with God.⁵³ For Timon knew about Xenophanes's conception of God,⁵⁴ and as a consequence, this unity that was, according to him, Xenophanes's only certainty, has to be God's. This divine nature is described as the unity Xenophanes sees “wherever [he extended his] mind”, beyond the multiplicity and movement of beings. The materialistic lexicon might intrigue: this unity would also be that into which everything “dissolves”, as if it were a material cause. Such a view was not so uncommon, however, especially in the Orphic circle.⁵⁵ It appears then that according to Timon too, Xenophanes identified God with the unity hidden behind all things, i.e. was a pantheist. Therefore, one can presume that this was the mainstream interpretation in classical and Hellenistic times.

This does not entail that Xenophanes was considered as a monotheist: Aristotle claims that the unity is God, not that God is one.⁵⁶ The idea that there is one God that unifies the whole universe is perfectly compatible with the existence of

⁵¹ See Steinmetz (1966) 35–37 and Finkelberg (1990) 110.

⁵² On the construction of this sentence, see Di Marco (1989) 250–251.

⁵³ This is already the interpretation of Sextus Empiricus in *Pyrr.* 1 225 (= A35/Xen. 90). On the unity of God, cf. fragment B23 (n. 21).

⁵⁴ See fragment 60 Di Marco.

⁵⁵ This is at least the interpretation one finds in the Derveni papyrus (Column XVII) of the Orphic claim that “Zeus is the first, [...] the last, [...] Zeus is the head, Zeus is the middle, by Zeus all things are made”: the author understands ‘Zeus’ as equivalent to a material constituent, i.e. air. On the pantheistic aspect of the Derveni papyrus, see Betegh (2004) 176–179. On the possibility that Xenophanes might have been influenced by Orphism, see Schäfer (1996) 168–169 and Palmer (1998) 27–30.

⁵⁶ Even if one reads τὸν θεόν as subject and not attribute, the article of τὸ ἓν still indicates that God is assimilated with ‘the one’, not simply one.

lesser gods who might play another role within the world. Therefore, there is no contradiction between Aristotle's claim in T1 that Xenophanes considered the gods as eternal and the one in the *Metaphysics* according to which God is the unity of the universe.

This pantheist interpretation of Xenophanes still justifies his connection with Parmenides: since he would have claimed that there is a unity behind all things, one could attribute him the thesis that everything is one.⁵⁷ This claim would presumably mean something quite different from what Parmenides would imply with "everything is one":⁵⁸ Xenophanes is presented neither as an ontologist nor as a monist in the sense that he would think that there is only one being.⁵⁹ But for Plato and Aristotle to establish a loose connection between them, it is enough that they can attribute to Xenophanes the claim "everything is one".

3. How seriously did Plato and Aristotle consider Xenophanes? And in particular, did they regard him as a philosopher or as a poet? I already indicated that their haziness in the description of Xenophanes's thought might suggest that they considered it as hazy itself.⁶⁰ I will now show that we have many good reasons to think that they both regarded him as a poet and not a philosopher.

I will first take into consideration similar passages in Plato's works, in order to establish how he regards thinkers like Xenophanes. Critics often draw a parallel with the *Theaetetus*, where Plato repeatedly claims that Homer had the same

57 Cf. Guthrie (1962) 383.

58 I do not wish to support here any kind of interpretation of Parmenides's thought, or even of Plato's or Aristotle's reading of his monism (this would take me too far: Palmer 1999 dedicates a whole book to the issue of Plato's interpretation of Parmenides, so does Clarke 2019 for Aristotle). They both attribute him the claim – which does not appear in the fragments – that "everything is one" (see Plat. *Parm.* 128a–b and Arist. *Ph.* I 2.185a22), and whatever meaning they give it, it is presumably quite different from pantheism.

59 Against Finkelberg (1990) 108 n. 17, who claims that Aristotle did not consider Xenophanes as a theologian but as an ontologist – even though he never talks about being or even principles in his presentation of Xenophanes. Palmer (1998) 3 goes as far as to claim that Aristotle regards Xenophanes as a "crucial transitional figure, as one of the first to present the type of metaphysical characterization of divinity that led to what one might term 'theo-ontology'"; this judgement is hardly compatible with Aristotle's condemnation of Xenophanes as 'crude'.

60 On the rejection of the poets/theologians on the basis of clarity, see Palmer (2000). I agree with his claim that "when Aristotle says that some statement by one of the *theologoi* or by another of his predecessors is unclear, he does not mean that its expression is in itself unclear but simply that he does not feel that he can elicit from this statement a clear opinion on the particular question he happens to be considering" (189): for Aristotle, Xenophanes is imprecise because it is difficult to get his position on unity from his poem.

doctrine as Heraclitus.⁶¹ These texts should be studied thoroughly. There are indeed quite impressive similarities with the *Sophist*. For first, Plato talks in 160d about “Homer and Heraclitus and all such people” (“Ὅμηρον καὶ Ἡράκλειτον καὶ πᾶν τὸ τοιοῦτον φύλον), which echoes the “Eleatic tribe” (Ἑλεατικὸν ἔθνος) of T3. Even though there is no geographical community between Heraclitus and Homer, it appears that Plato establishes a similar kinship between them as he does between Xenophanes and Parmenides. Even more interestingly, in 179c, he mentions “those Heracliteans or, as you say, Homerians and even more ancient people” (Ὀμηρείων καὶ ἔτι παλαιότερων). The parallel with the syntagma Ξενοφάνους τε καὶ ἔτι πρόσθεν in T3 is quite obvious. Who are those predecessors? One could imagine that Plato does not think about anyone in particular.⁶² However, he claims in the *Cratylus*, just after quoting the same verse of Homer as in T6 (below), that Orpheus himself might have supported the same view as Heraclitus.⁶³ Mansfeld (1986) 26–27 advances the hypothesis that the predecessors of Xenophanes and Parmenides could also be Orpheus or Musaeus, according to whom there is one superior God.⁶⁴ In any case, it is clear that in both texts, Plato wants to emphasise that the opinion is very ancient.

What allows Plato to make such a comparison between Heraclitus and Homer? He explains it in the following text:

T6. Concerning [the thesis of perpetual mobility], let all the ancients, *except Parmenides*, agree, Protagoras and Heraclitus and Empedocles, and the masters of each kind of poetry, Epicharmus for comedy and Homer for tragedy. For when he said “Ocean, begetter of gods, and Tethys their mother”, he meant that everything is the offspring of flux and movement. (*Tht.* 152e)

Plato’s interpretation of Homer as a mobilist rests on the allegoric reading of a verse from the *Iliad* (XIV 201 and 302) according to which Ocean and Tethys are the parents of all the other gods. This poor support shows us two things: first, that very little is required in order to attribute a philosophical opinion to a poet. It is entirely possible that Plato did not have much more elements in Xenophanes’s poem to justify making him a pantheist—but since he does not quote him, this is impossible to ascertain. Second, if one bears in mind the little value Plato gives to the poets’ claims in the *Republic*⁶⁵ and to the interpretation of their verses (for example in the

⁶¹ Cf. Ross (1924) 153, Leshner (1992) 190 and Gemelli Marciano (2005) 119.

⁶² See *Prot.* 340e–341a, where Plato makes fun of the antiquity of Prodicus’s wisdom with a similar formulation (κινδυνεύει γάρ τοι, ὦ Πρωταγόρα, ἢ Προδίκου σοφία θεία τις εἶναι πάλαι, ἥτοι ἀπὸ Σιμωνίδου ἀρξαμένη, ἢ καὶ ἔτι παλαιότερα).

⁶³ *Cra.* 402b–c.

⁶⁴ On Orphism and pantheism, cf. n. 55.

⁶⁵ See especially X 599b–d and 602a on their lack of truth.

Lesser Hippias and *Ion*), it is clear that he is not strongly committed to the idea that Homer was a Heraclitean.

The interesting aspect of this parallel lies, of course, in the fact that Homer was no philosopher, but a poet. This gives support to the claim that Plato did not consider Xenophanes as a philosopher either, but only as a poetic predecessor of Parmenides, who might have uttered some verses that led people to believe he was a pantheist. Not only the formulations, but also the approach of the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* are indeed quite similar: in both cases, Plato wants to lend antiquity, and thereby authority, to the position he is attacking. Interestingly, in the *Theaetetus*, which mainly challenges Heraclitus's and Protagoras's relativism, Parmenides is the exception to a long line of mobilists (T6). By contrast, in the *Sophist*, where one of Plato's main targets is Parmenides's monism, his doctrine is endowed with antiquity and authority.⁶⁶ But when he seriously discusses monism, Plato never mentions Xenophanes again, neither in the *Sophist* nor in the treatise that is entirely dedicated to this issue, i.e. the *Parmenides*.⁶⁷

Aristotle's case is quite similar, and we find a lot of evidence that he considered Xenophanes as a poet. A first indication lies in the fact that he usually attributes to poets the kind of opinions that Xenophanes supports. For Xenophanes is not the only one who assimilated the world and God or gods: so did most of the poets according to Aristotle.⁶⁸ Similarly, the idea that God is the principle is not restricted to Xenophanes: in *Metaph.* B 4.1000a9–12, Aristotle claims that “the circle of Hesiod and all those who talk about gods” (οἱ περὶ Ἡσίοδον καὶ πάντες ὅσοι θεολόγοι) “made the principles gods and generated everything from gods” (θεοὺς γὰρ ποιοῦντες τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ ἐκ θεῶν γεγενῆσθαι). But these mythical conceptions should be rejected, as Aristotle says later on (1000a18–20), because they are unclear and do not rely on arguments. Similarly, he attacks Xenophanes for

⁶⁶ One can, of course, note that in the *Theaetetus*, Parmenides's rejection of movement makes him the exception, while in the *Sophist*, Plato mostly discusses his monism. But this monism is not any more widespread than Heraclitus's radical mobilism. Plato is not trying to establish what the main opinion of his predecessors historically was, but to build himself an impressive adversary, heir of a long tradition he reconstructs for his purpose – eventually with the help of sophistic catalogues.

⁶⁷ Cf. Gemelli Marciano (2005) 119.

⁶⁸ See *Metaph.* A 8.1074a38–b3: “the ancients and the elders told us in the form of a myth, left to posterity, that those [the first substances/the heavenly bodies] are gods and that the divine encompasses the whole nature (περιέχει τὸ θεῖον τὴν ὅλην φύσιν).”

“making nothing clear” and claims that he “should be set aside for our present inquiry” as being “a bit cruder”.⁶⁹

We should also take into consideration the context of our text T4. In *Metaph.* A 3–6, Aristotle presents the conceptions of his predecessors regarding the number and nature of the causes and tries to reduce the causes they found to the four he lists, i.e. material, moving, formal and final cause. Unlike in other doxographies, for example in the first book of the *Physics* or *On Soul*, Aristotle has some historical concerns in the *Metaphysics*: he is mindful of the chronological succession of the thinkers he studies,⁷⁰ and he is particularly interested in identifying the first supporter of a theory. It follows that he mentions not only philosophers, but also the poets that could be their predecessors. Hence, he examines the possibility that Homer may have claimed before Thales that water is the principle (983b27–984a1), that Hermotimus may have talked about the Intellect before Anaxagoras (984b18–20), and that Hesiod, instead of Parmenides, may have been the first to make Eros a principle (984b23–29). The connection between those predecessors and the philosophers is, as it was the case in Plato’s *Theaetetus*, quite superficial: concerning Homer, Aristotle’s explanation is that according to him, Ocean and Tethys are the parents of the gods and that the gods swear on the Styx, hence on water, and Hermotimus was a mystic who claimed to be able to separate his soul from his body.⁷¹ Interestingly, as in the case of Xenophanes and Parmenides, Hermotimus had some geographical connection with Anaxagoras, since he would also come from Clazomenae.

Aristotle remains quite cautious regarding these predecessors: he always expresses doubt that they really supported the same thesis as the philosophers they

69 Aristotle actually also rejects Parmenides and Melissus from his investigation because they do not really talk about principles: their one being is cause of nothing else (see *Metaph.* A 5.986b10–17 and *Ph.* I 2.184b25–185a17). The accusation of crudeness goes further, however, and only concerns Melissus and Xenophanes, but for different reasons. Melissus is also condemned as coarse (φορτικός) in *Ph.* I 2.185a10–12 because his arguments are not valid, and Aristotle often attacks the weakness of his demonstrations, especially the one in fragment B2 (see Brémond 2017, 29–37). But Xenophanes does not seem to be the object of such a charge: Aristotle mainly blames him for his lack of clarity, which is typical of the poets. I do not think then, as Palmer (1998) 3 does, that Aristotle “indicates that [Xenophanes’s] theological views would merit closer attention in a higher inquiry” when he rejects Xenophanes and Melissus from his present investigation.

70 Among many other examples, in A 3, he claims that Thales was the first philosopher (983b20–21), that Anaxagoras was anterior to Empedocles (984a11–12), and that the Eleatics came after the first monists (984a27ff.). He therefore attempts not only to classify the opinions of his predecessors but also to present a history of philosophy that proceeds toward the truth he alone discovered. Cf. Barney (2012) 71.

71 On this colourful character, see Betegh (2012) 116–118. Aristotle does not specify what the connection between Anaxagoras and Hermotimus would be.

are associated with. In the cases of Homer and Hermodotus, he attributes this connection to some anonymous source (τινες ... οἶονται in 983b28–29 and αἰτίαν δ' ἔχει in 984b19), and concerning Hesiod, he offers the hypothesis as a mere suspicion (984b23 ὑποπτεύσειε δ' ἄν τις). He concludes on Homer and Hesiod (983b33–984a1 and 984b31–32) by claiming that it is quite uncertain whether they really were the first to support such a claim. This caution is justified by his idea that poets were in general quite unclear, and that it is therefore difficult to ascertain what they really thought.⁷²

Admittedly, Aristotle is not so unsure about Xenophanes: even though he attributes to an indirect source the idea that he was Parmenides's teacher (λέγεται), he seems quite certain that he was the first to 'unify'. It remains that his condemnation of Xenophanes as unclear indicates that he had, according to him, no precise doctrine. Aristotle might have acquired his relatively greater insurance toward Xenophanes from Plato himself. It is also the case that, when he seriously discusses monism, without any such historical worry, Aristotle only mentions Parmenides and Melissus – especially in *Physics* I 2–3. This indicates that he does not really consider Xenophanes as a monist, nor as a philosopher worth the discussion.

This interpretation is confirmed when one takes into consideration Aristotle's other testimonies on Xenophanes. In *On Heavens*, he mentions his opinion that the Earth is infinite under our feet:⁷³

T7. For some say for this reason that what is under the Earth is infinite, by claiming that it has its roots in the infinite, for example Xenophanes of Colophon, so that they do not have the problem of looking for the cause (*Cael.* II 13.294a21–24 = A47/Xen. 4).

The attribution of such a theory to Xenophanes does not indicate that Aristotle considered him as a philosopher, since philosophers are not the only ones who have a world-conception.⁷⁴ On the opposite, Xenophanes's position is described as a way to avoid the difficulty of explaining why the Earth is not falling through space.⁷⁵ It is also interesting to note that Aristotle mentions Xenophanes's opinion first, before the one of Thales and the other philosophers, even though he acknowledges that Thales is elder: this suggests that he sets Xenophanes apart from the other thinkers because he is no philosopher. Moreover, if one accepts as authentic the syntagma "by claiming that it has its roots in the infinite",⁷⁶ one can

⁷² Cf. Palmer (2000).

⁷³ Fragment B28 corroborates this claim.

⁷⁴ Aristotle also mentions Hesiod in this treatise for his theory that nothing is eternal (III 1. 298b28).

⁷⁵ Cf. Palmer (2000) 182–185.

⁷⁶ Only some of the manuscripts transmit this bit. Moraux (1965) keeps it in his edition, but Allan (1936) brackets it. Cf. Aetius III 9.4, who uses a similar expression.

also draw a parallel with the *Meteorology*, where Aristotle attributes to the theologians the claim that the Earth and sea have roots.⁷⁷

Even more strikingly, apart from the two texts of the *Metaphysics* and *On Heavens* and a short mention in the *Poetics* (1460b35–1461a1), Aristotle only discusses Xenophanes in one of his works: the *Rhetoric*. He refers there to three sayings of Xenophanes about the gods and religion as examples of rhetorical arguments.⁷⁸ Hence, Xenophanes's claims are not considered as philosophical but as rhetorical. Aristotle might have regarded him as a religious thinker, but clearly not as a proper philosopher.⁷⁹ By contrast, Parmenides and Melissus are never mentioned in the *Rhetoric*, but rather in the *Sophistical Refutations* for the fallacy of their arguments.⁸⁰

It is also remarkable that even though Xenophanes claims in his fragment B27 that everything comes from earth and goes back to earth, and in fragments B29 and B33 that everything comes from earth and water, Aristotle, when he examines what elements were considered as material causes in *Metaphysics* A 3, does not mention him at all. He even says in *Metaphysics* A 8 that nobody among those who studied nature took earth as a principle (988b30 and 989a5–6), but that *most people*, and among them Hesiod himself, think that everything comes from earth. As a consequence, either Aristotle ignored the verses of Xenophanes concerning the earth (it is a possibility one cannot rule out), or he placed him not among the philosophers of nature, but among the mass and the poets.

Who then turned Xenophanes into a true Eleatic philosopher? I will argue that it is Theophrastus.

It is quite problematic to ascertain what Theophrastus said about Xenophanes since we do not have his works on the Presocratics (except the short treatise on sense-perception). Simplicius provides our main testimony in the following passage:

T8. Μίαν δὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἦτοι ἐν τὸ ὄν καὶ πᾶν καὶ οὔτε πεπερασμένον οὔτε ἄπειρον οὔτε κινούμενον οὔτε ἡρεμούν. Ξενοφάνη τὸν Κολοφώνιον τὸν Παρμενίδου διδάσκαλον ὑποτίθεσθαι φησιν ὁ Θεόφραστος ὁμολογῶν ἐτέρας εἶναι μάλλον ἢ τῆς περὶ φύσεως ἱστορίας τὴν μνήμην τῆς τοῦτου δόξης. τὸ γὰρ ἐν τούτῳ καὶ πᾶν τὸν θεὸν ἔλεγεν ὁ Ξενοφάνης.

⁷⁷ “Then the ancients and those who devoted themselves to theology gave [the sea] springs, so that the *Earth and the sea could have principles and roots*. For they supposed that the object of their talk is all the more dramatic and august for being a large part of the whole. And they structured the rest of the world (οὐρανὸν ὅλον) around it and for its sake because they thought that it is *worthier and a principle*” (*Meteor.* II 1.353a34–b5).

⁷⁸ In I 15.1377a18–24 (Xen. 10), II 23.1399b5–9 (T1) and 1400b5–8 (Xen. 12).

⁷⁹ Cf. Leshner (1992) 191.

⁸⁰ This is especially the case for Melissus: see the texts collected in Brémond (2017) 164–167.

Xenophanes of Colophon, Parmenides's teacher, assumed that the principle is one, or being and the whole is one, and that it is neither limited nor unlimited nor moved nor still, says Theophrastus, who admits that mentioning his opinion belongs to an investigation other than the one on nature. For Xenophanes said that this one and whole is God. (Simpl. *In Phys.* 22.26–31 = A31/Xen. 229)

The authenticity of this testimony has been contested.⁸¹ For the claim that God is neither limited nor unlimited nor moved nor unmoved not only is hardly Xenophanean,⁸² but it also contrasts with the reports of most doxographers, according to whom Xenophanes's God is limited and unmoved. Since those doxographies are usually thought to stem, in one way or another, from Theophrastus's *Physical Opinions*, it seems impossible for Theophrastus to be the author of the claim Simplicius attributes him. This suspicion is reinforced by the parallel with the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *On Melissus, Xenophanes and Gorgias* 3 (*MXG*), which attributes to Xenophanes similar claims but can hardly be attributed to Theophrastus for reasons of style and content. Moreover, T8 is followed by a series of arguments that prove that God is eternal, one, neither limited nor unlimited and neither moved nor unmoved. These arguments are more or less the same as the ones in the *MXG* and are usually recognised as forgeries. To sum up, the unreliability of the theses attributed to Xenophanes and even more of the arguments developed after T8 justify doubting Simplicius's reference to Theophrastus. Therefore, some thought that Simplicius mistook the author of the *MXG* for Theophrastus, others delete part of the sentence (the claims that God is neither limited nor unlimited and neither moved nor unmoved) as non-Theophrastean but still accept the rest of it.⁸³

I will not fully discuss this point here, since it would bring me too far. Let us just assume, as seems reasonable, that Simplicius is not completely mistaken when he attributes this claim to Theophrastus, since he clearly had access to at least part of Theophrastus's work. I follow many critics in the following statements, which I will not justify here:⁸⁴ (1) the arguments developed after T8 are not Theophrastean (and Simplicius does not explicitly say that they are), but stem from the *MXG* or from some common source with the *MXG*;⁸⁵ (2) Theophrastus is the author

⁸¹ See the arguments in Wiesner (1974) 211–212. Mansfeld (1987) 307 n. 8 and Kurfess (forthcoming) present a thorough account of the various interpretations of this passage.

⁸² Apart from the fact that it is unlikely for Xenophanes to have supported such a negative theology, one must note that he clearly claims in B26 that God is unmoved (see n. 20).

⁸³ See Diels (1879) 108ff. and 480 for the first option and Diels (1879) 480, Moraux (1984) 454–455 and Wiesner (1974) 285 for the second one.

⁸⁴ See among others McDiarmid (1953) 118 and Mansfeld (1987) 307–309.

⁸⁵ For the hypothesis that Eudorus of Alexandria was the common source, see Mansfeld (1988).

of the claims Simplicius attributes him in T8; (3) he did not think, however, that Xenophanes gave antinomic predicates to his God, but rather that he did not pronounce on whether God was limited or unlimited and moved or unmoved. This would be partly justified by Aristotle's *Metaphysics* A 5: for in this text, Aristotle draws the idea that Parmenides talked about a formal kind of unity and Melissus about a material kind of unity from the fact that the one said that being is limited and the other that it is unlimited. Since in T4, he claims that Xenophanes was unclear as to what kind of cause he was referring to, one could easily interpret this as meaning that Xenophanes did not specify whether his God was limited or unlimited.

I will focus here on the other aspects of this testimony, in order to establish that they are also drawn from Aristotle – which will reinforce the claim that the attribution to Theophrastus is trustworthy. Most elements reported in T8 clearly parallel, indeed, what Aristotle says in the *Metaphysics*.⁸⁶ First, Theophrastus takes over the claim that Xenophanes was Parmenides's teacher.⁸⁷ His statement that “Xenophanes said that this one and whole is God” just makes explicit Aristotle's “looking at the whole universe, he says that the one is God”. The claim that Xenophanes's thought belongs to another investigation also echoes Aristotle's idea in T4 that one should not study Xenophanes. It should already be noted, however, that the science Xenophanes does not belong to, according to Theophrastus, is physics, not metaphysics. This can be justified by Aristotle's assessment in *Physics* I 2⁸⁸ that a physicist should not study the Eleatics, because physics is a study of principles and the one being cannot be a principle for anything else; in this text, however, Aristotle only mentions Parmenides and Melissus.

There is another important difference: while, as we said, Aristotle is quite cautious on Xenophanes's relationship with Parmenides and his doctrine, Theophrastus, if one follows Simplicius, describes Xenophanes's thought with much less circumlocutions. Most importantly, he attributes him a doctrine of *being*, τὸ ὄν: Xenophanes would not just talk about God, as Aristotle says, but about being.⁸⁹ Therefore, we find in Theophrastus the first interpretation that makes Xenophanes

⁸⁶ Cf. McDiarmid (1953) 116 and Schirren (2013) 344. I disagree with Finkelberg (1990) 116, who takes the similarities between Aristotle and Theophrastus to stem from Xenophanes himself. The parallels he draws with Timon in order to justify this authenticity (120) are not nearly as striking as he claims.

⁸⁷ Xenophanes's Colophonian origin is not mentioned in the *Metaphysics*, but in *On Heavens* (T7).

⁸⁸ 184b25–185a17. Cf. n. 69.

⁸⁹ Cf. Leshner (1992) 192.

an ontologist and assimilates his God with being, which was our definition of eleatisation.

One could say that this reference to being could be a formulation of Simplicius himself, not of Theophrastus. Its Theophrastean character is confirmed, however, by a careful examination of the claim, which is explicitly attributed to Theophrastus, that mentioning Xenophanes's opinion belongs to another investigation than the one on nature. Theophrastus does not aim, as some critics thought,⁹⁰ to reject Xenophanes from the realm of serious philosophy, in which case he would agree with Aristotle. As already mentioned, this criticism echoes the one in *Physics* I 2, where Aristotle rejects monism because it makes physics impossible. It should first be noted that this remark is pertinent for Eleatic monism, understood as meaning that there is only one thing existing, but hardly for the thesis that God is the world, or even that there is only one God: for while the Eleatics reject any kind of plurality, and therefore, according to Aristotle, any cause-and-effect relationship, pantheism is perfectly compatible with physics. The fact that Theophrastus regards Xenophanes's thought as foreign to physics indicates that he considered him as a proper Eleatic, and confirms that he identified God and being.

This rejection from physics also echoes Aristotle's analysis of the Eleatics in *On Heavens*:

T9. For some of them completely rejected generation and corruption: they say that no being comes to be and perishes, but that it only seems so to us – for example Melissus's and Parmenides's circle. Even if they talk correctly about the other things, one must not think that they talk in a physical way. For the fact that some beings are ungenerated and completely unmoved belongs to an investigation *that is different and prior to physics* (μᾶλλον ἐστὶν ἑτέρας καὶ προτέρας ἢ τῆς φυσικῆς σκέψεως). (*Cael.* III 1.298b14–20 = A47/Xen. 4)

Since Theophrastus's formulation (ἐτέρας εἶναι μᾶλλον ἢ τῆς περὶ φύσεως ἱστορίας) is very similar to Aristotle's, one can assume that he is making a direct reference to this text.⁹¹ What investigation should then Xenophanes's thought belong to, according to Theophrastus? In *On Heavens*, Aristotle mentions the science that studies ungenerated and unmoved beings, i.e. metaphysics or theology. When he says that Xenophanes's thought should be the object of another inquiry, Theophrastus is therefore turning him into a metaphysician, or a theologian in the philosophical meaning of the term.

Parmenides, according to Aristotle (A 3.984b1–3 and A 5.986b27–987a2), somehow escapes this accusation of making physics impossible because he also talked about two principles, fire and earth. Aristotle opposes in T4 Parmenides's

⁹⁰ For example Babut (1974) 435–436.

⁹¹ Cf. the analysis of Finkelberg (1990) 114–115.

insight on this matter and Xenophanes's and Melissus's crudeness, but he does not explicitly claim that Xenophanes did not do any physics: he rather seems to imply that he is crude because of his lack of clarity. Theophrastus, however, appears to think that Xenophanes did not do any physics at all. This is suggested in another passage that Alexander of Aphrodisias quotes:

T10. About Parmenides and his doctrine, Theophrastus says in the first book of *On Natural Things*: “coming after him (he means Xenophanes), Parmenides the Eleatic, son of Pyres, took the two ways (τούτω δ' ἐπιγενόμενος Παρμενίδης Πύρητος ὁ Ἐλεάτης – λέγει δὲ καὶ Ξενοφάνην – ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρᾳς ἦλθε τὰς ὁδοὺς). For he both claims that the whole is eternal and tries to explain the generation of beings. He does not think in the same way about both, however, but he supposes that from the point of view of truth, the whole is one, ungenerated and spherical, while from the point of view of the opinion of most people, in order to explain the generation of perceptible things, he makes the principles two, fire and earth, the one as matter and the other as cause and agent.” (*In Metaph.* 31.7–14 = Xen. 128)

According to Theophrastus, Parmenides followed two ways: the ontological one, by claiming that everything is one and unchanged, and the physical one, with two principles and some change. This double approach is presented as an innovation with respect to his predecessor, which Alexander identifies as Xenophanes. Therefore, for Theophrastus, Xenophanes must have taken only one way, i.e. metaphysics, and done no physics at all.⁹² In this respect, he would be, like Melissus, a pure Eleatic, who made no concession to the world as it appears. Theophrastus probably drew this interpretation from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (T4), by interpreting the opposition between Xenophanes and Melissus on one side and Parmenides on the other as an opposition between those who completely rejected physics and Parmenides who made it possible thanks to his two principles.

The idea that for Theophrastus, Xenophanes did not present any physics, is clearly problematic, for we have many testimonies in the doxographies regarding Xenophanes's physics: he would have claimed that everything comes either from earth or from earth and water, that there are multiple universes, that the sun comes from bits of fire, etc.⁹³ And many critics think that most of the information that can be found in these doxographies comes from Theophrastus's *Physical Opinions*. Aristotle himself attributes to Xenophanes the theory that the Earth is infinite under our feet (T7). As a consequence, one would suppose that Theophrastus

⁹² Cf. Finkelberg (1990) 128.

⁹³ On Xenophanes's physics, see especially Pseudo-Plutarch *Stromata* (quoted in Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 1.8.4 = Xen. 162), Hippol. *Haer.* 1.14.2 (= A33/Xen. 119) and Diog. Laert. IX 19 (= A19/Xen. 145). These opinions are also mentioned in various passages of Aetius: see the texts quoted by Strobel and Wöhrle (2018) (Xen. 95–105 for Pseudo-Plutarch, Xen. 204–220 for Stobaeus).

should know something about Xenophanes's physics, and should not claim that he was a mere metaphysician.

One might counter this objection by saying that there is no clear evidence that Theophrastus himself wrote anything about Xenophanes's physics.⁹⁴ Galen, in *In Hipp. de nat.* XV 25, explicitly claims that Theophrastus said nothing about Xenophanes's theory of the elements. There is, however, one testimony that lends support to the idea that Theophrastus had some information on Xenophanes's physics, i.e. the one of Stobaeus:

T11. Ξενοφάνης ἐκ νεφῶν πεπυρωμένων εἶναι τὸν ἥλιον... Θεόφραστος ἐν τοῖς Φυσικοῖς γέγραπεν, ἐκ πυριδίων τῶν συναθροισμένων μὲν ἐκ τῆς ὑγρᾶς ἀναθυμιάσεως, συναθροισόντων δὲ τὸν ἥλιον.

Xenophanes says that the sun is burned clouds... Theophrastus wrote in his *Physics* that the sun comes from particles of fire gathered because of the wet exhalation. (*Flor.* I 25.1 = A40/Xen. 209)

This text raised an important debate, which is well summarised and analysed by Runia (1992):⁹⁵ does Stobaeus claim that Theophrastus is the author of the second opinion, which would be distinct from the first one, or is the whole passage exposing Xenophanes's thought, and Theophrastus would be quoted as a source? Stobaeus is quite ambiguous, and Pseudo-Plutarch (II 20) does not mention Theophrastus at all, but attributes the whole opinion to Xenophanes. I will not enter the debate here, but I am quite convinced by Runia, who makes a strong case in favour of Theophrastus being the author of the doxographical report, not the opinion on the sun. If one reads this text in this way, there is certainly a contrast between the portrait Theophrastus presents of Xenophanes in T8 and T10 as a mere metaphysician and the one in T11, according to which Xenophanes would commit to scientific claims on the world.

Finkelberg (1990) 129ff. tries to solve the apparent contradiction by claiming that for Xenophanes, the only true knowledge concerns God, since it is a deductive knowledge, while in the realm of physics, we are confined to mere opinion. This interpretation cannot explain, though, Theophrastus's distinction in T10 between Parmenides and Xenophanes: he claims that Parmenides "followed the two ways", inasmuch he discussed not only the truth of the one being, but also what is "from the point of view of the opinion of most people". But if one follows Finkelberg's

⁹⁴ This is the position of Mansfeld (1987) 289–294: "the vulgate accounts of Xenophanes' physical system do not derive from Theophrastus" (293).

⁹⁵ See also the discussion in Mansfeld and Runia (2009) 522–524.

interpretation, Xenophanes would have made exactly the same distinction, since his physics would also be confined to the realm of opinion.

I think that we can solve the issue by distinguishing between what Theophrastus says as a commentary to Aristotle and in his doxographical works. For, as we noted, every information provided in T8 finds an echo in Aristotle's text. It is also the case for T10, whose content is very close to the one in *Metaph.* A 3.984b1–3 and A 5.986b27–987a2: Theophrastus claims, just as Aristotle does, that Parmenides was the only one, among the monists, who introduced two principles, fire and earth, as a way to explain change. Since Theophrastus considered Xenophanes as a monist, he logically concluded that Xenophanes did not provide any explanation of the physical world.

Therefore, Theophrastus's eleaticising interpretation of Xenophanes does not rest on any personal reading of Xenophanes's poem, but only on what he thinks Aristotle is saying: like many critics who want to read Xenophanes as a true philosopher, Theophrastus took very seriously Aristotle's loose connection between Xenophanes and Parmenides. But in other contexts, when dealing for example with astronomy, he might have looked at what Xenophanes said in his poem and set aside his assertion that Xenophanes was no physicist at all.

To conclude, I will return to my initial question: how did Xenophanes become an Eleatic philosopher? To the question "who is responsible for this interpretation", I answered that Theophrastus was the first thinker who understood Xenophanes as a monist philosopher, while Plato and Aristotle mostly regarded him as a poet. To the question "why was Xenophanes eleaticised", there are different answers: Theophrastus reached this interpretation by taking a bit too literally Aristotle's claims. Plato and Aristotle themselves established some connection between Xenophanes and Parmenides both for historical reasons, because they were linked to the city of Elea and Xenophanes might have been Parmenides's master, and for doctrinal reasons, because Xenophanes too, in a way, claimed that everything is one, when he supported a pantheistic worldview. It appeared, however, that neither Plato nor Aristotle took very seriously this theory of Xenophanes nor its relationship with Eleatic monism.⁹⁶

Finally, I tried to disconnect this analysis from any consideration on what Xenophanes actually was and said, in order to focus only on how he was

⁹⁶ It is not impossible that the sophistic catalogues mentioned by Mansfeld (1986) already labelled Xenophanes as a monist, but it is far from necessary. If it were the case, according to my analysis, the catalogue should not have included Xenophanes among those who say that there is only one being, but rather that everything is one. But one can perfectly understand the inclusion of Xenophanes among the Eleatics by Plato and subsequently Aristotle without referring to such catalogues.

interpreted. One might still wonder whether the portrait that Plato and Aristotle present of Xenophanes, i.e. as a pantheist poet who might have known Parmenides in Elea, is close to reality. The question should, according to me, be connected with another one: how much did Plato and Aristotle know of Xenophanes, and more precisely, did they have access to his work? I already said that Theophrastus, at least in my texts T8 and T10, only drew his interpretation from Aristotle. Neither Plato nor Aristotle quotes any verse of Xenophanes, and our first fragments, indeed, only appear after Christ.⁹⁷

Plato says too little to determine what kind of material he had access to,⁹⁸ we must then turn to Aristotle. Although he never quotes Xenophanes, he still has some information about him: that he was a pantheist, the master of Parmenides, that he thought the Earth to be infinite under our feet; he also reports in the *Rhetoric* a few stories and sayings. It is noticeable, however, that when he presents Xenophanes's opinion in *Cael.* II 13.294a21–9 (cf. T7), he does not quote Xenophanes... but Empedocles's criticism of his opinion. Furthermore, one may compare the extent of Aristotle's knowledge of Xenophanes with his information on Thales. For he also tells some stories about his life and knows some of his theories: that the Earth rests on water and therefore water is the principle, that everything is full of gods, and that the magnet has a soul.⁹⁹ It is quite certain, however, that Thales left no written treatise: Aristotle must have gotten his information from other authors or maybe just from hearsay. One cannot exclude at all that it was also the case for Xenophanes – even though it is impossible to ascertain.

In order to find a testimony that is both independent from Plato and Aristotle and reliable inasmuch as its author really had access to Xenophanes's verses, one should probably turn to Timon. This Pyrrhonist thinker might provide a confirmation that Xenophanes was some kind of a pantheist, as I said, but he also clearly regarded him as a philosopher. One could, however, accuse him of being biased since he is looking for predecessors to Pyrrho. All of which shows how cautious one should be when using these testimonies to gain knowledge on Xenophanes's activity and thought.

⁹⁷ The first quotation we have is in Heraclitus the Stoic (B31), who lived in Nero's time.

⁹⁸ Many critics find an echo between his criticism of the traditional conception of gods in *Republic* II–III (especially the idea that gods are immoral) and Xenophanes's own attack of the poets (see Chrysakopoulou 2017, 175–185; Leshner 1992, 190). There is no certainty, however, that Plato was directly inspired by Xenophanes.

⁹⁹ See the texts collected in Wöhrle (2009) 46–53.

References

- Allan, D. J. 1936. *Aristoteles. De Caelo*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Babut, D. 1974. "Sur la 'théologie' de Xénophane." *Revue Philosophique* 164: 401–40.
- Barnes, J. 1982. *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Barney, R. 2012. "History and Dialectic in *Metaphysics A 3*, 983a24–984b8." In *Aristotle's Metaphysics Alpha. Symposium Aristotelicum*, edited by C. G. Steel, 69–104. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Betegh, G. 2004. *The Derveni Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology and Interpretation*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Betegh, G. 2012. "The Next Principle." In *Aristotle's Metaphysics Alpha. Symposium Aristotelicum*, edited by C. G. Steel, 105–40. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brémond, M. 2017. *Lectures de Méliossos*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Cerri, G. 2000. "Senofane ed Elea (Una questione di metodo)." *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 66 (3): 31–49.
- Cherniss, H. 1935. *Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press.
- Chrysakopoulou, S. 2017. "La Théologie de Xénophane." In *Physiologia: Topics in Presocratic Philosophy and Its Reception in Antiquity*, edited by C. Vassallo, 169–97. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier.
- Clarke, T. 2019. *Aristotle and the Eleatic One*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Clayman, D. L. 2009. *Timon of Phlius. Pyrrhonism into Poetry*. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter.
- Di Marco, M. 1989. *Timone di Fliunte. Silli*. Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo.
- Diels, H. 1879. *Doxographi Graeci*. Berlin: Reimer.
- Diels, H., and W. Kranz. 1951. *Die Fragmente Der Vorsokratiker*, 6th ed., Vol. I. Berlin: Weidmann.
- Finkelberg, A. 1990. "Studies in Xenophanes." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 93: 103–67.
- Gemelli Marciano, M. L. 2005. "Xenophanes: Antike Interpretation und kultureller Kontext. Die Kritik an den Dichtern und der sogenannte 'Monismus'." In *Frühgriechisches Denken*, edited by G. Rechenauer, 118–34. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.
- Gigon, O. 1945. *Der Ursprung der griechischen Philosophie. Von Hesiod bis Parmenides*. Basel: Schwabe.
- Guthrie, W. K. C. 1962. *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kirk, G. S., J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield. 1983. *The Presocratic Philosophers: a Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kurfess, T. forthcoming. "Eleatic Archai in Aristotle: A Dependence on Theophrastus' *Natural History*?" In *Presocratic Natural Philosophy in Later Classical Thought*, edited by C. C. Harry, and J. Habash. Leiden: Brill.
- Lanza, D. 2005. "Xenophanes: Eine Theologie?." In *Frühgriechisches Denken*, edited by G. Rechenauer, 102–17. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Leshner, J. H. 1992. *Xenophanes of Colophon: Fragments, a Text and Translation with a Commentary*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Mansfeld, J. 1986. "Aristotle, Plato and the Preplatonic Doxography and Chronography." In *Storiografia e Dossografia nella Filosofia Antica*, edited by G. Cambiano, 1–59. Torino: Tirrenia.
- Mansfeld, J. 1987. "Theophrastus and the Xenophanes Doxography." *Mnemosyne* 40 (3-4): 286–312.

- Mansfeld, J. 1988. "Compatible Alternatives: Middle Platonist Theology and the Xenophanes Reception." In *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, edited by R. van den Broek, T. Baarda, and J. Mansfeld, 92–117. Leiden/New York: Brill.
- Mansfeld, J., and D. T. Runia. 2009. *Aëtiana. The Method and Intellectual Context of a Doxographer*, Vol. 2. Leiden: Brill.
- McDiarmid, J. B. 1953. "Theophrastus on the Presocratic Causes." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 61: 85–156.
- McKirahan, R. D. 2010. *Philosophy before Socrates: An Introduction with Texts and Commentary*, 2nd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Moraux, P. (ed.) 1965. *Aristote. Du Ciel*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.
- Moraux, P. 1984. *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen: von Andronikos bis Alexander von Aphrodisias*, Vol. 2. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter.
- Palmer, J. 1998. "Xenophanes' Ouranian God in the Fourth Century." *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 16: 1–32.
- Palmer, J. 1999. *Plato's Reception of Parmenides*. Oxford/New York: Clarendon Press.
- Palmer, J. 2000. "Aristotle on the Ancient Theologians." *Apeiron* 33 (3): 181–205.
- Palmer, J. 2009. *Parmenides and Presocratic Philosophy*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Reinhardt, K. 1916. *Parmenides und die Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie*. Bonn: Cohen.
- Ross, W. D. 1924. *Aristotle's Metaphysics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Runia, D. T. 1992. "Xenophanes or Theophrastus? An Aëtian 'Doxographicum' on the Sun." In *Theophrastus: His Psychological, Doxographical, and Scientific Writings*, edited by W. Fortenbaugh, and D. Gutas, 112–40. New Brunswick/London: Transaction Publishers.
- Schäfer, C. 1996. *Xenophanes von Kolophon: ein Vorsokratiker zwischen Mythos und Philosophie*. Stuttgart/Leipzig: Teubner.
- Schirren, T. 2013. "Xenophanes." In *Die Philosophie Der Antike*, edited by H. Flashar, D. Bremer, and G. Rechenauer, 339–74. Basel: Schwabe.
- Steinmetz, P. 1966. "Xenophanesstudien." *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 109 (1): 13–73.
- Stokes, M. C. 1971. *One and Many in Presocratic Philosophy*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press.
- Strobel, B., and G. Wöhrle. 2018. *Xenophanes von Kolophon*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Vassallo, C. 2015. "Senofane e lo scetticismo antico." In *Le travail du savoir: philosophie, sciences exactes et sciences appliquées dans l'Antiquité*, edited by V. Gysembergh, and A. Schwab, 165–93. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier.
- Wiesner, J. 1974. *Ps.-Aristoteles, MXG: der historische Wert des Xenophanesreferats. Beiträge zur Geschichte des Eleatismus*. Amsterdam: Hakkert.
- Wöhrle, G. 2009. *Die Milesier: Thales*. Berlin: De Gruyter.