

II.—God and Gods in Early Greek Thought

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The article is summarized in the last paragraph.

In the second book of the *Republic* Plato brings up his heaviest guns to attack the poets' stories about the gods. We will not tolerate them in our state, he says, not only because they have damaging effects on the young but because they are false, they misrepresent the divine nature.¹ And he proceeds to lay down a few "outlines" (*typoi*) for the guidance of the poets. First, god, ὁ θεός,² must be represented as he is, namely as good and the cause of good. Hence a passage like Achilles' famous account of the jars on Zeus's doorstep (*Il.* 24.525 ff.) must be expunged from the record. This, then, is the first "outline" concerning *the gods*, that *god* is only the cause of good.³ The second states that *god* does not change form;⁴ or, as Socrates says in summary,⁵ *the gods* do not change form. Finally, it is impossible that *god* should tell lies;⁶ *gods* and men alike hate a real lie, "the lie in the soul";⁷ *god*, that is, *the divine*, τὸ θεῖον καὶ τὸ δαιμόνιον,⁸ is free from deception; *god* is simple and true; or, to sum it all up, *the gods* neither lie nor deceive.⁹

In this passage Socrates constantly shifts number in a curious way; his initial statements and summaries tend to speak of deity in the plural, his arguments in the singular. None of those present seems to boggle at his language, in fact it appears that the singular (including the neuter singular τὸ θεῖον) and the plural are accepted as identical. And yet Socrates' success depends on their not being quite identical. In each successive *typos* he is appealing to an intuition or concept of god as such, which he then applies to the familiar stories of divine beings, "the gods." Singularity appertains to the concept, plurality to the stories; there is a real alternation of thought between the two. And finally, most curious feature of all, whereas to our minds the shadow of monotheism passes over the

¹ *Rep.* 377D ff.

² 379B.

³ 380C.

⁴ 380D.

⁵ 381E.

⁶ 382A.

⁷ 382C.

⁸ 382E.

⁹ 383A.

argument again and again — the suggestion that really there are not many gods but only god — no one present seems to notice it. Socrates returns unchallenged from his monotheistic excursions to rest in the gods: a purified polytheism, but polytheism for all that.¹⁰

Similar discussions take place in the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon, 4.3,¹¹ and especially 1.4, the argument with the practising atheist Aristodemus, where singular and plural alternate again and Socrates ends by saying, “If you will worship *the gods* you will come to understand that *the divine* (τὸ θεῖον) is such that *they* [the gods] see and hear all, are everywhere, and care for everything.”¹²

Of course the alternation between ὁ θεός and οἱ θεοί is familiar elsewhere;¹³ but these passages seem to me to bring out the paradox most vividly, that fifth- and fourth-century Greeks could talk monotheistically *and* polytheistically at the same time and without appearing to be aware of a contradiction. The roots of these two modes of speech and thought are worth investigating.

If we go back to one of the very passages which so offended Plato, Achilles to Priam (*Il.* 24.525 ff.), we find the same alternation. Ay me, says Achilles, such is the portion *the gods* have allotted to mortals, a life of misery. Two jars sit on Zeus’s doorstep, containing the gifts *he* dispenses: to some men evil, to some good, and to some a mixed lot. Such were the gifts of *the gods* to Peleus (534). He was wealthy and powerful, and *they* made a goddess his consort. But *god* (538) gave him too an evil gift, that he should have only one child — and now he sits here at Troy. And so the *Heavenly Ones* (547) have brought this present woe on you also, old man, the prelude of more to come.

¹⁰ When it comes to the religious ordering of the new state, *Rep.* 4.427B, there is no question of monotheism. The matter is left to Apollo of Delphi, who was notoriously conservative in such things.

¹¹ *Mem.* 4.3.3–14: Socrates expatiates at length on the benefactions of “the gods” to men; to which Euthydemus replies, *ibid.* 15, that he is sure he will never again neglect to *daimonion*.

¹² *Mem.* 1.4.18. Marchant’s Oxford text brackets *αὐτοῖς* on the strength of its omission in one inferior ms. The omission, like *αὐτό* in Parisinus 1302, is an emendation by somebody who could not understand *αὐτοῖς* so soon after τὸ θεῖον. At 1.4.2 the discussion is said to be περὶ τοῦ δαιμονίου; then the terms follow: 4, οἱ [sc. ἀπεργαζόμενοι, i.e., οἱ θεοί]; 5, ὁ ποιῶν [i.e., ὁ θεός]; 10, τὸ δαιμόνιον; 11, θεοὺς; 13, τῷ θεῷ, θεῶν; 14, θεοὺς; 16, τοὺς θεοὺς; 17, τοῦ θεοῦ; 18, τῶν θεῶν, τὸ θεῖον.

¹³ E.g., Pind. *P.* 2.49, 88; *O.* 13.104; Aesch. *Pers.* 742; Ag. 1424; Soph. *Ant.* 1273; *El.* 1267; Eur. *Ion* 569. For Herodotus see below, note 58.

It is clear that, whatever be Achilles' theology, "god," "gods," and even "Zeus" are equivalent terms throughout the passage. And that his mode of expression is not eccentric is proved by a speech like Nestor's narrative of the journey homeward from Troy (*Od.* 3.130–183), where the divinities involved are Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, "the gods," and "god" (*θεός* and *δαίμων*).¹⁴ Nestor is less vague than Achilles, but he uses the same mode of speech, including the alternation between proper name and common noun and between singular and plural.

Nobody would suggest that Achilles or Nestor alternately believes in one god and many. Nor can it be maintained that the singular *theos* refers each time to the divinity last mentioned by name.¹⁵ The solution lies rather in the principle enunciated by Jörgensen, Hedén, and Ehnmark¹⁶ as to Homeric utterances about the gods, namely that *the poet always knows what god is present in or responsible for a given situation, while the human characters usually do not*. The poet's knowledge of the divine nature and behavior is precise, encyclopedic, binding; that of the characters is vague, limited, unauthoritative. There is no need to recite here the cases where the poet knows *what* god has intervened while his characters only know that *a* god has intervened, or where he knows the attitude of a certain divine personage while they do not.¹⁷

¹⁴ Nestor's story in outline: we embarked and *god* scattered the Achaeans, 131; *Zeus* was meditating a grievous return for them, 132; they encountered an ill fate because of the wrath of *Athena*, 135, who stirred up a quarrel between the Atridae; Agamemnon thought to appease *Athena*, 145, but the mind of *gods* is not easily turned, 147; thus we were divided, and *Zeus* was preparing woe for us, 152; half of us set sail, and *god* smoothed the sea, 158; at Tenedos we sacrificed, but *Zeus* was not yet planning our return and stirred up strife a second time, 161 [but it was *Athena* who had stirred it up before, 136]; I knew what suffering *god* (*daimôn*) was planning, 166; we asked (the?) *god* for a sign, 173; he showed one and gave us a route to escape ill fortune, and a gentle wind arose, 176; at Geraistos we sacrificed to *Poseidon*, 178; the wind held all the way home, from the time when *god* first set it blowing, 183.

¹⁵ There is a general equivalence of "god" and "Zeus" in both passages, but *theos* cannot be taken as referring specifically and consistently to the particular god Zeus, since it sometimes occurs at some distance from his name, with *theoi* or another god's name intervening, *Il.* 24.538, *Od.* 3.183; or it precedes it, *Od.* 3.131. It could just as well be said that "Zeus" refers to *theos*. See below, p. 30.

¹⁶ Ove Jörgensen, "Das Auftreten der Götter in den Büchern ι-μ der Odyssee," *Hermes* 39 (1904) 357 ff.; E. Hedén, *Homerische Götterstudien* (diss. Uppsala, 1912) 16 ff. (not seen by me); Erland Ehnmark, *The Idea of God in Homer* (Uppsala, 1935) 64–5.

¹⁷ E.g., Apollo stirs up Hector, *Il.* 17.75–81, but Menelaus only sees that Hector

When the Homeric usage of *θεός* and *θεοί* is surveyed from this vantage-point, setting on one side utterances of the poet and the gods themselves, on the other side utterances of the human characters,¹⁸ some important distinctions emerge. But they emerge against a significant background of uniformity. Back of all Homeric thought and speech — of the poet, the gods, or men — lies the common assumption that a plurality of gods exists. “Die Götter sind da.”¹⁹ There are no atheists, but also no monotheists, in Homer. Any one, including the poet, may have occasion to refer to a single god or many; singular and plural are equally natural according to the context. There is no usage in which either number may not occur. One prays to or addresses a god or the gods,²⁰ reverences or fails to reverence a god or the gods,²¹ is dear to a god or the gods,²² does something with the help or approval of a god or the gods,²³ receives blessing or bane from a god or the gods;²⁴ and the divine wrath, retribution, counsels, prophecies, actions, etc., may be those of one god or many.²⁵

is being helped by a god (*daimona*, 98; *theos*, 99); Poseidon speaks to the Aiantes, *Il.* 13.47, but they only know that “some god” has appeared to them, 68; Odysseus is put to sleep by Athena, *Od.* 5.492, but later, 7.286, he says merely that “(a) god” did it. The Trojan women make offering and pray to Athena, *Il.* 6.297 ff.; the poet knows, but they do not, that their prayer is denied, 311. Any reader can multiply instances.

¹⁸ The survey included *theos* and *daimôn*, but since the plural normally does not reveal whether its reference is definite or indefinite (cf. Hedén quoted by Ehnmark, *op. cit.* 67 note 2) it was taken into account only when it appears in significant juxtaposition or parallel with the indefinite or generalizing singular.

¹⁹ Wilamowitz, *Der Glaube der Hellenen* 1 (Berlin, 1931) 17.

²⁰ There is no need to cite more than sample cases for this and the following points (notes 21–25). Naturally a single god is usually referred to by name, not with the word *theos*. Prayers: *Il.* 1.35, Chryses to Apollo; *Il.* 6.476, Hector to Zeus and the other gods; *Od.* 12.337, Odysseus to all the gods.

²¹ Reverence: *Il.* 1.215–18, Achilles to Athena; 16.710–11, Patroclus before Apollo; 24.503 = *Od.* 9.269, Priam to Achilles, and Odysseus to Polyphemus: reverence the gods; *Od.* 21.28, Heracles did not respect the vengeance of the gods.

²² *Il.* 1.381, Chryses dear to Apollo; 24.67, Hector dearest of mortals to the gods; *Od.* 7.316, may this not be dear to Zeus.

²³ *Il.* 5.185, Pandarus to Aeneas: Diomed is being helped by a god; cf. *Od.* 15.531; *Od.* 3.28, Athena (as Mentor) to Telemachus: it is not without the gods(’ help) that you have grown up (note also *daimôn*, 27); cf. *Od.* 6.240, 24.444; *Il.* 9.49, Diomed: we came with god; cf. *Il.* 24.430, Priam to Hermes disguised: escort me with the gods(’ help). This latter idiom also in Attic, e.g. Soph. *OT* 146; Aesch. *Ag.* 913.

²⁴ *Il.* 1.178, Agamemnon to Achilles: god gave you your strength and valor; 6.156, Glaucus to Diomed: the gods gave Bellerophon beauty and prowess; 9.493, Phoenix to Achilles: the gods did not accomplish (grant) me any offspring.

²⁵ Wrath: *Il.* 1.75, of Apollo; 5.178, of (a) god; *Od.* 2.66, of the gods. Retribution: *Il.* 16.388, *Od.* 20.215, 21.28, of the gods; *Il.* 4.507, of Apollo; 15.115–16, of Zeus. Counsel(s): *Il.* 8.370, of Thetis; *Od.* 16.402, 11.276, of the gods. Signs and prophecies:

Nevertheless there are differences in usage. They arise not from differing opinions as to the basic assumption, but from different kinds and degrees of knowledge in the speaker. The gods know each other and each other's names and activities and have no occasion for the indefinite *θεός* or *θεῶν τις* except when talking to men.²⁶ Neither does the poet, whose knowledge is accredited as coming from the gods.²⁷ Both the gods and the poet, then, are correctly polytheistic in their language. And so are men when they have the guidance of cult or prophecy. But they are not always so precise. Not only do they not always know what god or gods they are dealing with, and whether it is one or more; it does not always matter very much.

It does matter intensely in any genuinely religious transaction. A prayer, for example, cannot but be felt as addressed to a person, and one wants to know his name, his identity, if it is ascertainable.²⁸ Likewise a man in the midst of a strenuous action where gods may be present will want to know not only that they are there but who they are.²⁹ His knowledge may be vague and imprecise in fact, but it is concrete and precise in intention — as that of the poet and the gods is concrete and precise in fact. If he speaks of "(a) god," it is because he cannot yet say more.

Od. 15.168, god showed this sign; cf. 3.174 (above, note 14); 3.215, god's voice; cf. 14.89; *Il.* 4.398, signs from the gods; 5.64, oracles from the gods.

²⁶ The gods know each other; *Od.* 5.79; *Il.* 23.388, *Hymn to Hermes* 154. *Il.* 5.128, Athena tells Diomed that she has taken the mist from his eyes so that he can tell both (a) god and (a) mortal; this is said from the point of view of the mortal. But a god can use *theos* predicatively; *Il.* 18.394, Hephaestus to Thetis: you are a revered and awesome goddess to me.

²⁷ Ehnmark, *op. cit.* (above, note 16) 70: "For obvious reasons the poet was in quite a different position from that of the ordinary man. His knowledge is unlimited and he has no doubt as to the identity of the intervening god; he can even tell what was the object of the god's intervention and how it took place. Whether we assume that Homer believed in his gods or not, it was his right and duty as a poet to supply definite information on those points that were left vague and indefinite in the popular conception of the gods. In this respect the position of the poet is, *mutatis mutandis*, similar to that of the oracles." Divine source of the bard's knowledge: *Od.* 1.338; 8.44, 63, 73, 480, 498; 22.347.

²⁸ Wilamowitz, *op. cit.* (above, note 19) 21: "Ein unbestimmter *θεός* kann gar keinen Kultus erhalten, weil er keine Person geworden ist. Wie soll man ihn zum Opfer laden? Und könnte er kommen?" *Ibid.* 33: "In allen Flügen und Beschwörungen kommt es auf die peinliche Einhaltung der zauberkräftigen Worte an, dann also auch darauf, dass der Gott bei seinem richtigen Namen gerufen wird." Cf. Ehnmark, *op. cit.* 69.

²⁹ *Il.* 15.247, Hector asks Apollo who he is. *Il.* 22.297, the sign of Hector's doomed state is that he has failed to recognize Athena; once he recognizes that it was she, he is prepared for death.

It is when men are withdrawn from action and the urgent need to reach or influence the gods, when they are recalling their own past life in tranquillity or reflecting on life in general, that they are content with the recognition of "god," the divine "x," as operative in our existence. Man is then neither a worshipper nor an actor, nor yet a professional relater of the doings of the gods; he is in neither the religious nor the mythical sphere. He is Achilles remembering his father, or Nestor remembering the long voyage home, or a humble man like Eumaeus or Melanthius commenting piously and resignedly on the ways of "god" with man.³⁰ The mood of this kind of talk is recognition and resignation combined. And therefore it constitutes no real threat to polytheism.

There are many passages in both *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, especially the latter, where "god" is mentioned as the dispenser of good and bad fortune, happiness and suffering in general, and where the context makes it either unlikely or impossible that *theos* is merely an indefinite way of referring to a particular deity.³¹ The same things are said, often by the same people, about "the gods";³² that is, Homer freely interchanges singular and plural in this sort of context. It is in this sphere, then, where god is felt simply as giver and man as receiver of good and ill, that *theos* seems first to attain or approach real generality. We have here another form of apprehension of divinity, quite distinct from the apparatus of mythology and divine personality and quite capable of existing alongside it because its frame of reference is different and perpetually renewed; the actual, observed world of happiness and suffering, success and failure, for which mythology has only indirect and tardy explanations, is in the foreground here, while the divine world is seen only through its operations, not in its own distinct forms.

The word *δαίμων*, which itself means "dispenser," points in the same direction.³³ The gods themselves do not use the term to

³⁰ Eumaeus, *Od.* 14.444; god will give one thing and leave another alone as he pleases, for he can do anything; 14.65: god makes the work grow; 17.218, Melanthius: god brings like together with like.

³¹ The usage occurs in *Il.* 1.178; 2.436; 6.228; 7.288; 9.445, 703; 13.727, 730, 743; 17.99, 688; 19.159; 21.103; 22.285; *Od.* 4.181(?); 8.44, 170, 177, 498, 570; 9.158, 339(?); 11.292; 13.317; 14.65, 227, 309, 444; 17.218, 399; 18.37, 265; 19.485, 488, 496; 20.344; 21.213, 280; 22.347; 23.185(?), 222.

³² E.g., cf. *Od.* 3.269, 11.292; *Il.* 1.178 (cf. 16.867), 4.320, 6.156; *Od.* 14.65, 15.372 (Eumaeus); 23.210, 222 (Penelope).

³³ On *daimón* see Wilamowitz, *op. cit.* (above, note 19) 362-69.

refer to each other, and the poet in his own character uses it only seldom;³⁴ but it is on the lips of men frequently (especially in the *Odyssey*) when they refer to the operation of divine power on the fortunes of a particular man, or men in general.³⁵ It is not a religious word and the *daimôn* as such is not a personality; one does not pray to a, or the, *daimôn*.

The different metrical shape of the word *daimôn*, together with its similarity in meaning to the generalized *theos*, led to a further development. *Daimôn* can stand in the last foot of a hexameter line, and in other places where *theos* and *theoi* cannot. Hence it tends to become a standing alternative (especially common in the *Odyssey*) for *theos*, according to the metrical situation.³⁶ There are even signs in Homer of extension to the plural (*daimones* = *theoi*), and in the Homeric hymns *daimôn* is already used freely to refer to known gods. But that development is not our theme.³⁷

The other equivalent for *theos generale* is "Zeus." Without going into the problem of the particular god Zeus, it is clear that his name is often alternated with *theos* without appreciable difference of meaning, in the speeches of Achilles and Nestor already cited and elsewhere.³⁸ This generalized Zeus = "god" is to be distinguished from the dramatic Zeus of the scenes on Olympus, and for that matter also from the personalized supreme god of Hesiod and the Attic poets.

These alternations of *theos* with *theoi*, *daimôn*, and especially "Zeus" might be taken to mean that we have nothing more here after all than haziness about the identity of the god concerned. And it is true: where the speaker says "god," or even "gods," if

³⁴ *Daimôn* is used by gods only in the formula *δαίμονι ἴσος*, *Il.* 5.459, 884, and by the minor god Aeolus, *Od.* 10.64; by the poet, chiefly in *δαίμονι ἴσος*, *Il.* 16.705, 786; 20.447, 493; 21.18, 227; otherwise *Il.* 1.222, *μετὰ δαίμονας ἄλλους*, a unique phrase which has caused much discussion, and 3.420, *ἤρχε δὲ δαίμων*, also unique as referring to a definite deity (but see below, note 36); *Il.* 11.480; 15.418; *Od.* 5.396 (~ 10.64, see above).

³⁵ E.g., *Il.* 6.115; 7.291; 11.792 *σὺν δαίμονι* (cf. *σὺν θεῷ*); 15.468 (cf. 473, *θεός*); 17.98, 104 (cf. 99, *θεός*; 101, *θεόφιν*); *Od.* 2.134; 6.172; 7.248; 11.61; 12.169; 18.256 (cf. 265, *θεός*); 24.306.

³⁶ Of 56 occurrences of *daimôn* listed by Ebeling for *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, 36 are nom. sing. in the last foot, usually preceded by a verb of dactylic shape (the commonest is *ἤγαγε*). All but seven of the 36 cases are in the *Odyssey*. But *daimôn* can also begin a line, and its oblique cases have different metrical value from those of *theos*.

³⁷ See above, note 33.

³⁸ E.g., *Od.* 4.173 *Ζεύς*, 181 *θεός*; 14.300, 305 *Ζεύς*, 309 *θεός*, 310 *Ζεύς αὐτός*; cf. 7.248 *δαίμων*, 250 *Ζεύς*. This parallel usage also (*θεός*—*Ζεύς*) would bear metrical investigation.

he were challenged to give a name he would probably try to do so, and probably in more cases than not he would say "Zeus." Certainly his unspecified "god" is not another divinity alongside Zeus, Apollo, etc.³⁹ He means whatever divine power there is, without trying to say more; if pressed he will offer a name — usually, no doubt, the commonest and easiest — that is familiar to him from cult or poetic tradition. The answer "Zeus" does not bespeak any penetrating thought-process. And yet the tendency toward generalization is also there. The tendency to relapse into anthropomorphism or particularism is not decisive evidence to the contrary, even where it can be demonstrated; for the two tendencies are not real contraries. Even much later, when the concept of a single divine nature had long been familiar, it still constituted no bar to belief in a plurality of divine beings; and the developed term $\delta \theta ε \acute{o} \varsigma$ = "god" no more necessarily implied the existence of only one god than $\delta \alpha \nu \theta \rho \omega \pi \omicron \varsigma$ implied the existence of only one human being. $\Theta ε \acute{o} \varsigma$ was certainly a generic word from the beginning (it was probably predicative in origin, though we do not know its root meaning),⁴⁰ and was therefore available to Homeric men for such generalizing use as they were capable of or inclined to. What is lacking in their speech is not the tendency to generalize, but *the explicit awareness that a generalization is being made*, and a nexus of terms and procedures through which it can be made fruitful. It remained for the sixth and fifth centuries to provide the nexus.⁴¹

Nevertheless the Homeric idiom is of major importance. It is also a paradox. For here it is just the common folk, and active men in their moments of reflection, who talk the language of philosophy to come. Their mode of speech is vague, uninstructed, even uninquiring, but it carries the germ of future thought. Gods, priests, bards are above it; they have too much $\sigma \phi \iota \alpha$, technical knowledge

³⁹ As Nilsson at one time thought, *A History of Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1925) 165. See Ehnmark, *op. cit.* (above, note 16) 71.

⁴⁰ The etymology is still uncertain: Walde-Pokorny, *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch d. indog. Sprachen* 1 (Berlin-Leipzig, 1930) 867; though Otto Kern, for example, *Die Religion der Griechen* 1 (Berlin, 1926) 126, still accepts Bechtel's explanation as "the shining one." On the original predicative use of *theos* see Wilamowitz, *op. cit.* (above note 19) 18. B. Snell, *Die Entdeckung des Geistes* (Hamburg, 1946) 204, shows how the "Dingwort" in itself has a generic character which is original but is brought into sharper focus by the development of the generic definite article.

⁴¹ We have no good test of the awareness of generalization without the article, and it is only clinched by the development of the neuter substantive (see below, p. 35). But see Eduard Meyer quoted below, note 45.

about the gods, to talk in such a fashion. They cannot see the wood for the trees.

The existence of such a way of speaking about the gods would have to be posited for seventh-century Ionia from Homer alone.⁴² But there is also other evidence, from the elegy, to some extent from other lyric poetry, and from Ionian philosophy.

For Ionian non-epic poetry in the late seventh century we have Callinus, Mimnermus, Archilochus, and Semonides. The brief fragments of Callinus yield nothing for our purpose, and Archilochus not much.⁴³ But Mimnermus talks like Achilles ("so hateful has god made old age," 1.10 Diehl; "there is no man to whom Zeus does not give many ills," 2.15–16 D.),⁴⁴ and Semonides like Eumaeus ("we mortals know not how god will bring each thing to fulfilment," 1.5 D.; "god made good sense apart from woman," 7.1 D.).⁴⁵ The instances are not many, but in the small body of these poets' extant work they are numerous enough not to be fortuitous.

The same conclusion can be drawn from sixth-century elegy, Solon and especially Theognis. Solon's elegies, like all his verse, bear the impress of his own powerful and original mind, and his theology is Hesiodic and Attic rather than Ionian; even so he has the generalizing singular of *theos* three times, two of them in popular or conventional contexts.⁴⁶ There are seven sure instances of it in Theognis, and three of *daimôn* in the same use, alternating with

⁴² Ehnmark, *op. cit.* (above, note 16) 65–66, accepts Hedén's view that the indefinite use of *theos* echoes the speech of Homer's own time, but rightly rejects his idea that it is an aristocratic expression which already betrays an advanced state of abstraction and scepticism.

⁴³ *Theoi*, Archil. 7 Diehl; 22; 58; *Zeus*, 68; 74; *daimôn*, 45, but referring to some particular deity; no case of *theos* in sing.

⁴⁴ *Zeus* also fr. 4 D.

⁴⁵ *Theos* also 7.7, 25 D.; *Zeus* 1.1; 7.93, 96. See Eduard Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums* 3² (Stuttgart, 1937) 552: "Schon Archilochos [...], Semonides, Mimnermos ist es geläufig, von den 'Göttern' oder einfach von 'Gott' als dem Lenker des Schicksals und Schirmer des Sittengesetzes [...] zu reden. Fragt man, wer dieser Gott ist, so lautet die Antwort natürlich Zeus — oder auch 'das Schicksal' (*Μοῖρα, εἰμαρμένον*, Kallin. 1.9.12). Aber der Name ist nichts mehr zur Sache, der Begriff ist das Wesentliche geworden. Vor der Idee der Gottheit beginnen die Einzelgestalten der Götter zu erblasen — noch nicht im Kultus und in der praktischen Betätigung der Religion, wohl aber in der zunächst fast unbewussten Empfindung und bald auch in der erwachenden Spekulation." Meyer has postdated the phenomenon, he perhaps gives it too clear and definite a status by speaking of "Begriff" and "Idee der Gottheit," and he does not stress its specifically Ionian provenance; but he correctly indicates its importance for the future.

⁴⁶ 1.69 D.; 19.3; 23.2. Note the sequence in his prayer to the Muses (1 D.): 55. *theoi*; 64, *theôn*; 69, *theos*; 74, *athanatoi*; 75, *Zeus*.

"Zeus" and "the gods" in the familiar way.⁴⁷ Furthermore, in Theognis we can observe how the choice of word and number depends at least in part on the metrical shape of the form and its suitability for various places in the hexameter or "pentameter" line.⁴⁸ Finally, we note that Theognis uses the generalizing singular of *theos* only in speaking of deity as dispenser of blessings and woes (usually woes) to men.⁴⁹

To this we may add that our idiom is not found in Alcaeus, Sappho,⁵⁰ Tyrtaeus, (Alcman),⁵¹ Anacreon, Stesichorus, Ibycus; and only once in Hesiod.⁵² That is, it is not native to early monodic or choral lyric (Alcaeus, Sappho, Anacreon, Ibycus; Alcman, Stesichorus) and not at home in the Aeolis (Alcaeus, Sappho), the Cyclades (Archilochus), or the mainland (Hesiod, Tyrtaeus, Alcman) except as inherited through the elegy (Solon, Theognis). All the evidence points to the same place and time of origin: Ionia proper, that is, the Asia Minor coast and adjacent islands (Homer, Mimnermus, Semonides) in the seventh century.⁵³

It is not likely that the idiom is specifically "literary," i.e., Homeric, since Homer does not use it when he speaks for himself. On the contrary, he seems to echo here the actual ways of speech of his own country and time. Neither is it an exclusively aristocratic locution,⁵⁴ since swineherds, goatherds, and women use it as well as great lords. It simply represents the way of thinking and talking of ordinary Ionians, neither priests nor bards, without access to special knowledge about the gods. Now the early elegiac poets, and the reflective poets and philosophers who follow them, *are precisely such men*. Where Homer spoke, if not from divine inspiration, at least from a professional tradition and the accumulated "theological" lore of generations of bards, Mimnermus or Semonides or even Solon is thrown on his own ideas or apprehensions of god, with

⁴⁷ *Theos*, Theogn. 123, 151, 321, 432, 589 (~Solon 1.69), 865, 1189; *daimôn*, 149, 403, 1333 (the last two at the end of a line). Alternation of *theos*, *theoi*, 589, 591.

⁴⁸ In 123, 321, 432, 589, 865, 1189 the plural either of *theos* or the verb, or both, will not fit the meter; in 149, 403, 1189 neither *theos* nor *theoi* will fit. *Daimôn* fits the end of the hexameter line, *theos* and *theoi* of the pentameter.

⁴⁹ All the instances are nom. case, with verbs *ποιέω*, *δράζω*, *δίδωμι*, *τίθημι*, *πέμπω*.

⁵⁰ Sappho is fond of words and phrases meaning "godlike" (2.1 D.; 55b.1, 14; 71.3); otherwise *theos* (not generalizing) only in 67.3; 69.1; 135.2.

⁵¹ *Daimôn* once in Alcman 1.23 D., with predicate *ἔδωκε δῶρα*, 25, and summary *ἔστι τις σίων τλεις*, 36. See below, note 55.

⁵² Only WD 756, and in predicative use *ibid.* 764 (suggested by 756?).

⁵³ See Wilamowitz, *op. cit.* (above, note 19) 350.

⁵⁴ See above, note 42.

only cult and a public literary tradition to guide him — a very different matter. Homer spoke as a specialist, they speak as laymen.

The early elegiac poets, then, in their reflections on divinity and its workings in our lives, are in the position of Homer's characters, not Homer himself. This is a distinction which, if conscientiously observed, would go far towards solving some of the conventional paradoxes about the "Lyric Age" and the "rise of individualism" in Greek literature. Individualism was rampant in the Greek world long before Homer. It is rampant in Homer's poems, but Homer himself is no individualist; his professional tradition forbids it. The lyric poets are not under any such taboo; they lack his knowledge, but also its limitations. On the other hand melic poetry proper, monodic or choral, has a different orientation. Whether as singer of his own immediate joys and sorrows or his own personal relation to a special divinity or as spokesman of a community in ritual and celebration — sharing the context of a particular cult and the knowledge or assumptions of its communicants — he is essentially active rather than reflective. Again, so far as he accepts the Homeric myths about the gods and retells or reshapes them, he takes upon himself the Homeric mantle of the specialist. Neither as expresser of immediate experience nor as *mythopoios* is he likely to speak of "god" without qualification. These active and mythical modes tend to remain separate from the reflective, the ones embodied in melic proper, the other in elegy and Semonides' type of iambic, until late in the sixth century. With Simonides, and then Pindar, the gnomic stream begins to run into choral lyric — and with it the generalizing use of *theos*.⁵⁵

By the fifth century both the "polytheistic" and the "monotheistic" mode are common property: parallel, yet still subtly distinct. Plato and Xenophon could draw on both as part of the common stock of Attic speech.

We have already touched on some of the reasons why the generalization of (*ho*) *theos* did not lead to real monotheism. But one Ionian did take, or try to take, the decisive step. Xenophanes of Colophon, fellow-townsmen of Mimnermus, led by experience or observation and his own restless nature, seems to have started from the worn and colorless concept of "god" and given it new con-

⁵⁵ E.g., Simon. 4.7 D.; 10; 11; 63. The beginning is perhaps in the modest gnomic section of Alcman's great *partheneion* (see above, note 51).

tent. With him a negative idea, to which no positive intuition had corresponded, becomes the vessel of a genuine intuition, the key to truth.⁵⁶ Only Xenophanes went in this particular direction; but only an Ionian could or would have done so. And even Xenophanes is not a true monotheist; his One God is still "greatest among gods and men."⁵⁷

More important for us is the final development that took place in Ionia itself. The persistence of the basic idiom (*ho*) *theos* in Ionia is attested by Heraclitus and Herodotus.⁵⁸ Here, in the sixth century, the general concept of "the divine," *to theion*, was abstracted from *ho theos*. There is reason for ascribing the invention to Anaximander;⁵⁹ in any case it belongs to Ionian natural philosophy, whence it spread to the Sophists,⁶⁰ Attic speech, and Plato. The decisive step, as with Xenophanes, was the filling of the old undifferentiated idea of "god" with new content. Anaximander, or

⁵⁶ Aristotle, *Metaph.* 1.5, 986B18 ff. (= 21 A 30 Diels-Kranz), excludes Xenophanes from consideration as a real philosophical monist because he did not get at either the unity of essence or the unity of matter, but *εἰς τὸν ὄλον οὐρανὸν ἀποβλέψας τὸ ἐν εἰναί φησι τὸν θεόν*. That is, Xenophanes got his new concept merely by looking around him. But in any case it was a new concept of *ὁ θεός*. W. Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (Oxford, 1947) 41. ff., sees in Xenophanes the intellectual revolutionary who perceived the devastating novelty of the new definitions of "the divine" by the Milesians (see below, note 59) and took them up as a weapon against Homeric anthropomorphism. But Xenophanes was neither a Homeric rhapsode — as Jaeger rightly says — nor a scientific thinker; he operates neither with the anthropomorphic gods nor with *to theion*, but with *theos*, the old undifferentiated Ionian "god" to whom he gives new form and status. The reform is a practical one: e.g., at the symposium men are to sing a fitting hymn to "god" instead of the old, bad tales about Titanomachies and the like, 21 B 1.13–22 D.-K.

⁵⁷ 21 B 23 Diels-Kranz. The expression is of the well-known "polar" type; but in spite of Wilamowitz (note on Eur. *Her.* v. 1106) it cannot quite be reconciled with a thoroughgoing monotheism.

⁵⁸ Heraclitus: 22 B 67 D.-K.; 102; cf. 11, with Kranz's note; 83; 79, *δαίμονος*. On these fragments and the related ones 32, 41, 64, and 78 see Olof Gigon, *Untersuchungen zu Heraklit* (Leipzig, 1935) 135–148. Apropos of the old equation *theos*: *Zeus* note that Heraclitus's divinity "will and will not be called Zeus" (fr. 32). Herodotus has the generic use of (*ho*) *theos* thirty times: J. E. Powell, *A Lexicon to Herodotus* (Cambridge, 1938) 166 (but Powell's rubric "monotheistically" is misleading).

⁵⁹ Jaeger, *op. cit.* 31, 203–6, gives the most recent and authoritative view of the probable origin and development of the term. He ascribes it to Anaximander (by interpretation of Arist. *Phys.* 3.4. 203B6 ff. = 12 A 15 D.-K.), but does not consider out of what linguistic matrix he fashioned it.

⁶⁰ By way of such men as Diogenes of Apollonia, on whom see Jaeger, *op. cit.* 204; note that Diogenes calls his "air" *theos*. Cf. Critias B 25.16 D.-K., on the invention of "*to theion*"; he also calls it *daimôn* (*ibid.* 17, 39) and *daimones* (42). For alternation of *theos*, *theoi*, and *to theion* cf. also Gorgias B 11.6; 11a.17 D.-K.

the unknown innovator, was working in a tradition of Ionian speech that goes back to Homer and perhaps beyond.

Thus Plato and Xenophon inherited two singular terms, besides the conventional plural, to represent the concept of god as such or the divine in general: *ho theos* and *to theion*. Both are Ionian in origin, but of different date and provenance: the one an item of ordinary untechnical speech at least as far back as the seventh century, the other a philosophical (Milesian) coinage of the sixth. *Theos* is the Homeric man's — not Homer's — unpretentious and unsophisticated way of referring to the general divine power that operates in human life. This locution is found also in early elegy and spreads by the fifth century to other areas of Greek speech. It led to one essay at monotheism, in Xenophanes. *To theion* represents a higher stage of abstraction. But in early Greece to speak of "god," without qualification, is to speak like a layman. The road that ultimately led to theology did not begin with the experts.