INTRODUCTION

This book is first and foremost a study of the verses of Hesiod, Xenophanes and Parmenides. It examines these thinkers as key figures in the emergence of systematic epistemology and systematic reflection on the nature of speculative inquiry. I submit that, in each of the three thinkers, novel forms of critical and reflective thought coexist with novel positions concerning the relation and interactions between gods and mortals. Indeed, in the case of each author, critical thinking on the one hand, and reflections about the interactions between mortal and divine on the other hand, play complex, harmonious and equally integral roles, which can be understood fully only in relation to one another. The thread running throughout the book is the thesis that, for Hesiod, Xenophanes and Parmenides alike, theology and 'anthropology' are logically prior to epistemology.[1] More specifically, their divergent views on the cognitive capacities and limitations of mortals are, and can only be properly understood as, a corollary of their correspondingly divergent views on (i) the nature of the divine, (ii) the nature of the mortal and (iii) the nature of the relation and interactions between them. The book aims not merely to argue for this thesis, but also – and in particular – to demonstrate and explore its usefulness as a fresh perspective on a range of often long-standing interpretative problems.

The book falls into six chapters. In Chapter 1, I situate the inquiries pursued in the subsequent chapters in their proper relation to broader fundamental questions concerning rationality and irrationality, and philosophy and religion. This opening chapter aims to bring to the fore the bigger issues at stake in the subsequent

[1] I use the term 'anthropology' here in an etymological sense, referring to conceptions of the human.

investigations into interrelations between theology and epistemology. In doing so, it clarifies the insight which the results of those investigations afford for our understanding of early Greek philosophy and religion more generally. Historically, we have associated under the single term 'rational' very distinct intellectual phenomena. On the one hand, we describe as 'rational' coherent, critical, inferential, questioning and explicative thinking. On the other hand, we often identify as 'rational' human inquiries that proceed without any appeal to divine interference or aid, as well as, more generally, secularising moves away from god-centred patterns of thought and explanation. In Chapter 1, I consider the problematic influence that these deep-seated associations have exerted and continue to exert on the business of interpreting early Greek philosophy. I submit that the difficult challenge of extricating ourselves from their long shadow lies largely ahead of us. Similarly, we will examine the entrenched expectation that philosophy should operate more or less independently from traditional religion and pull in opposite directions from it, as well as the nexus of assumptions that underpins this expectation. We will ask in what ways, within the context of Greek polytheism, some philosophers can indeed be seen to come into conflict with some traditional religious attitudes and practices and to what extent such critiques were or were not perceived as a religious problem or a social threat. To be sure, philosophical critiques are important and should not be marginalised. But the engagements of philosophers with traditional or non-philosophical religious attitudes are hardly limited to criticisms. Furthermore, philosophical criticisms can sometimes be inextricably combined with positive and creative appropriations, even of those very same aspects of traditional religion that are being criticised. Ultimately, philosophical theologies constitute one aspect of the flexible and inclusive mass of beliefs, representations and practices that was Greek religion. The studies of Xenophanes and Parmenides in this book offer two extended illustrations of these principles.

In Chapter 2, we turn to Hesiod and, in particular, to the striking and enigmatic way in which his Muses articulate their relation to the poet in lines 27–8 of the *Theogony*: 'We know how to speak many falsehoods which are like verities, and we know, whenever

we wish, how to utter truths.' We will consider this address both in its immediate context in the *Theogony* and against the broader background of Hesiod's reflections on the mortal and the divine, and the male and the female. I will argue that, in the *Theogony*, Hesiod decisively and consistently encourages a cautious and destabilising stance in response to the Muses' address: the Muses leave it uncertain – and no mortal poet could himself ascertain – whether the verses which they inspire comprise truths, falsehoods or some combination of the two. Hesiod's understanding of his relation to the Muses, moreover, forms one poetic-epistemological aspect of a coherent and holistic conception of the human condition as a whole. At one juncture elsewhere in the Hesiodic corpus, however, we encounter a competing and more optimistic reinterpretation and revaluation of the Muses' address (*Works and Days* 646–62). We will tentatively consider certain theological developments in Hesiod's thought, which could underlie and explain this divergence between Hesiod's epistemological stance in the *Theogony* and at this moment in the *Works and Days*. More importantly, we will see that a synoptic consideration of the poet's voice, as it emerges from the Hesiodic corpus as a whole, produces a picture of epistemological and theological *ambivalence*. Ultimately, the primary thrust of the Muses' address to the poet is to raise, but leave unresolved, the question of the proper way to interpret it. Put differently, Hesiod's Muses crystallise, not an epistemological position, but an epistemological framework. Within this framework, the problem of epistemology becomes – for Hesiod as for the philosophers who followed his lead – the problem of understanding the nature of the interactions between mortal and divine.[2]

Chapter 3 addresses Xenophanes' reflections on the nature of divine disclosure. By contrast with the common view, Xenophanes does not deny categorically the reality of divine disclosure. Nor, however, does he acquiesce in traditional assumptions of disclosure. Rather, Xenophanes specifically rejects *traditional*

[2] The reasons for according such focused treatment and pride of place to Hesiod are elaborated more fully in Ch. 1.5, which discusses further Hesiod's intrinsic interest and his formative relation to later philosophical thought (or, if one is so inclined: to later, philosophical thought).

conceptions of divine disclosure as theologically faulty. He supplants those traditional conceptions with his own, alternative understanding of what divine disclosure amounts to and how it works. Xenophanes' novel conception of divine disclosure grounds his novel views concerning the possibilities and limitations of mortal beliefs and speculative inquiry. It forms, moreover, one coherent aspect of his overall re-conceptualisation of divinity and of his social and moral world view. Xenophanes, then, does not simply reject traditional ideas about divine disclosure without a trace. Rather, he *transforms* those traditional ideas in radical ways. Xenophanes remained profoundly influenced by what he rejected.

Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to the difficult and complex case of Parmenides. In Chapter 4, we will see that Parmenides advances a physiological theory of human cognition. According to this theory, humans *qua* humans must, as a matter of physiological necessity, experience and form beliefs about multiple, heterogeneous, mobile and differentiated things and processes. They cannot but experience and think in terms of such sensory contrasts as light and dark, hot and cold, rare and dense, etc. Famously, however, Parmenides thought that Being or 'what-is' had very different features. What-is is ungenerated, imperishable, indivisible, homogeneous and immobile. Why, then, did Parmenides think that mortals must continue to reflect about and strive to understand the natures of generated, multiple, heterogeneous and mobile things and processes, even after they came to realise that the ultimate reality – what-is – involves no generation, multiplicity, heterogeneity or motion? I will argue that Parmenides' theory of human cognition best positions us to answer that much-debated question. To think of and in terms of generated, heterogeneous and mobile things and processes is a necessary and even appropriate aspect of what it is to think and live as a mortal. If, however, we explain in this way Parmenides' abiding interest in cosmological accounts of change and differentiation, then a new problem arises. If humans are hardwired to think in terms of sensory contrasts and about differentiated and heterogeneous objects, then how was Parmenides – a human – *also* able to sustain the qualitatively different kind of thought that is necessary for conceiving of the

undifferentiated and homogeneous what-is? If humans must, by physiological necessity, think in terms of multiplicity and heterogeneous differentiation, then how was Parmenides also able to think otherwise? In Chapter 5, I argue that the human agent for Parmenides is not *simply* and *strictly* human. The mortal also possesses a divine part or aspect: his fiery and aethereal soul. The mortal is capable of sustaining a higher-than-mortal type of thinking by momentarily coming to think with – or as – his divine soul. This is, moreover, the fundamental reason for which Parmenides begins his poem by describing his journey to a goddess, who proceeds to disclose the truth of things to him. The goddess, through her disclosure and guidance, enables the mortal to come to think with or as his divine soul and to sustain the higher-than-human thought which is required for the cognition of what-is. It is only through the goddess's initiation, therefore, that Parmenides was able to master the system of argumentation that is developed in the poem, and so to comprehend, evaluate and accept for himself the truth of the doctrines which the goddess revealed.

In this way, we can do justice to the emphatic prominence in Parmenides' poem of both divine disclosure and argumentative reasoning. Furthermore, as we develop this interpretation, we will see Parmenides drawing in positive and appropriative ways on a variety of contemporary and traditional religious models, including poetic inspiration, divinatory oracles, mystery initiations and metempsychosis.

These discussions of Hesiod, Xenophanes and Parmenides are offered as essentially self-standing studies that, in conjunction, disclose instructively divergent yet related approaches to epistemology. In Chapter 6.1, we will consider more directly the critical and formative engagements by Xenophanes with Hesiod and by Parmenides with both Hesiod and Xenophanes. Our discussion of the interrelations between the three thinkers will shed further light on, and will itself in turn be illuminated by, the individual studies of them in the previous chapters.

As I indicated above, we begin in Chapter 1 by considering critically certain historical and still-influential notions of rationality and irrationality. *Positive* accounts of rationality, which seek to identify some of what rationality includes and excludes, will not

be a starting point for this book but – within the confines of its particular scope – will be one of its outcomes. In Chapter 6.3, I recapitulate certain, more or less implicit ideas of rationality which I find to be operative in Hesiod, Xenophanes, Parmenides and Empedocles, as well as in some other models of the interactions between gods and mortals (such as divination). Within the intervening chapters themselves, we will not be helping ourselves to the terms 'rational' and 'irrational' as interpretative tools.

This book does not pretend to offer a wholesale reconsideration of early Greek philosophy nor, indeed, to exhaust the immensely rich and challenging question of the connections between theology and epistemology in early Greek philosophy. I aim to offer here a new analysis of these connections and of their significance in some key episodes in the emergence in archaic Greece of systematic reflection on the nature of speculative inquiry. I by no means wish to suggest that the story ends there. On the contrary, it is my hope that the interpretative approaches developed and pursued here could serve as useful starting points for considerations of other and later developments in philosophy, theology and epistemology. In Chapter 6.2, we will take one such forward look by considering (in a focused and circumscribed manner) one especially important and illuminating later case: the epistemological significance of the *daimôn* and Muse in the thought of Empedocles. We will find that Empedocles too couches his epistemological reflections within a broader theological framework. Furthermore, Empedocles too posits his own version of what I will refer to in this book as 'epistemically significant interactions'. By this term, I mean interactions between mortal and divine agents that enable the mortal to attain knowledge, or to come by potentially true beliefs and views, which he could not have attained or come by independently of those interactions.[3] I will use the terms

[3] Heraclitus would offer another productive test-case for the interrelations between theology and epistemology (cf. Ch. 1.3, n.98). Heraclitus, however, does not predicate his inquiry on a notion of epistemically significant interactions readily comparable to Hesiod's Muses, Xenophanes' model of divine disclosure, Parmenides' goddess or Empedocles' Muse. Inclusion of him in this study would have required not only a significantly longer book, but also one with a somewhat looser thematic focus. As I do not claim to have exhausted the story, so too I do not pretend to have uncovered

'divine revelation' and 'divine disclosure' to refer to the same type of interactions.

As we shall presently see, there exists an artificial schism in the scholarship between conceptions of the early Greek philosophers as systematic, rational thinkers and as poets, mystics and religious figures. This schism also helpfully brings out a methodological divergence. Although we must eschew oversimplifying generalisations here, we can fairly say that, by and large, scholarship in the analytical tradition tends to reconstruct philosophical positions and arguments more through an internal examination pursued independently of advancing claims about their cultural, historical and literary context.[4] Historical reconstructions of *dialectical* context, moreover, tend to privilege a philosopher's formative reactions to the theories of those conventionally classified as his earlier philosophical colleagues. By contrast, what has come to be called the 'anthropological' approach seeks to re-contextualise texts that a long philosophical tradition de-contextualised.[5] At its most radical, however, this approach dismisses the study of theoretical and philosophical reflection in the textual output of those we call early philosophers as a failure to recognise that this output was fundamentally shaped by the agonistic cultural and pragmatic circumstances in which it was produced.[6]

The following investigations into Hesiod, Xenophanes and Parmenides draw essentially and throughout on a consideration of their complex engagements – competitive, polemical, appropriative, critical and creative – with a range of culturally prevalent paradigms of theology and epistemology. Philosophical texts are thus examined in the light of, but are not thereby reduced or assimilated to, their religious, literary and historical contexts. What follows is by focus and structure a study of Hesiodic, Xenophanean and Parmenidean epistemology. But it is also, and

any sort of master key for (early) Greek epistemology. For example, I cannot see that a comparable inquiry into the connections between epistemology and notions of the interactions between mortal and divine would be an especially productive way to approach Democritus' reflections about cognition, perception and speculative inquiry. On Democritus' epistemology, see Lee (2005) 181–250.

[4] Barnes (1982) xii makes the point explicit ('[p]hilosophy lives a supracelestial life etc'); see also Curd (2002) 133–4; Wedin (2014) 5.

[5] As Laks (2003) 20 puts it. [6] Explicitly in Gemelli Marciano (2002) 92, 96.

inseparably, a study of poetic inspiration, divination, mystery initiation, metempsychosis and, to put it most generally, a range of early Greek attitudes to the relation and interactions between mortal and divine. Homeric material, in particular, figures prominently throughout. This means that we will be encountering in this book what we might call different sorts or modes of 'theology'. When discussing Hesiod, Xenophanes, Parmenides and Empedocles, we will generally be dealing with more or less self-conscious, systematic and elaborated reflections about the divine. But we will find that expressions and representations of divination and mystery initiations, for example, can also convey certain conceptions of divinity, albeit in a more flexible and implicit – if not sometimes underdetermined and vague – manner.[7]

I do not wish to stake a universal methodological or theoretical claim. Different interpretative projects require and will reward different interpretative approaches. My contention is that, specifically with regard to the business of analysing the emergence of philosophical epistemology in archaic Greece, methodological purism of either stripe has led, and will inevitably lead, to reductive and distortive portrayals. Here, the analysis of systematic, critical reflection and the contextualisation of philosophical texts in their religious, literary and historical surroundings must, I believe, be pursued in relation to each other and illuminate one another. Logical and philological analysis, cultural and religious history and literary criticism are all indispensable tools. Walter Burkert's diagnosis of the state of Pythagorean scholarship in 1962

[7] On 'theology' as an interpretative category and the need to modify its application in different contexts and in relation to different materials, see further Eidinow, Kindt, Osborne and Tor (2016). A parallel point can be made about our use of the category of 'anthropology' in reference to ancient conceptions of the human. I will not attempt in this book to circumscribe a sharply defined category of 'myth' or 'philosophical myth', which I will then apply to, or tease out of, all the texts under discussion. This book defends particular contentions concerning the roles of, for example, Hesiod's Muses and Parmenides' goddess. If these contentions contravene any global conception of (philosophy's engagement with) myth, then, from the perspective of the present inquiry, so much the worse for that global conception. According to Morgan (2000) 1–37, for example, philosophers, even as they reintegrate myth, universally retain a polemical attitude towards it (e.g. 16–17, 34–5, 290–1). My own account of Parmenides DK28 B1 registers no tension between 'mythical' and 'philosophical' elements in his thought; contrast Morgan (2000) 5, 11, 67–87. As Parker (2011) 23 cautions: '"Greek myths" are not a unified category about which we have any reason to expect that general statements can be made.'

seems urgently relevant for current attitudes to early epistemology: 'The very thing that might seem rash, in view of the fundamental differences of interpretation, is what the nature of the situation demands: as many-sided a treatment of the problem as is possible.'[8]

[8] Burkert (1972; first published in German 1962) 12. 'Many-sided' syntheses of analytical, historical, religious and literary perspectives on early Greek philosophy are pursued by, for example, Cornford (1952); Lloyd (1966), (1979) and (1987); Mourelatos (2008*a*; 1st ed. 1970); Betegh (2004) and Bryan (2012).

1

RATIONALITY AND IRRATIONALITY, PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

We must not be misled by the use of the word *theos* in the remains that have come down to us.
John Burnet

1.1 Rationality and Irrationality

We may usefully begin with Parmenides' goddess. Parmenides was active in the city of Elea in South Italy in the early fifth century BCE and composed a poem in Hexametric verse. In the opening lines of his poem, Parmenides describes, in stunning and complex detail, the chariot ride of a youth – a *kouros* – to an encounter with a goddess (DK28 B1).[1] Once the youth reaches the goddess, she welcomes him (DK28 B1.24) and, from that point onwards, remains the sole speaker. The rest of the poem was, in its entirety, an address by the goddess to the *kouros*. The goddess proceeds to issue two rather distinct accounts, one of 'what-is' or 'the unshaken heart of well-rounded reality' (DK28 B1.29), the other a comprehensive cosmology. Famously, the goddess' account of what-is is developed through a sustained and sophisticated system of deductive argumentation, the first of its kind in extant Western thought. Now, just how we should think about the relation between these different components or aspects of Parmenides' poem – the *kouros*' journey to the goddess and her two subsequent accounts – will be a central preoccupation in the second half of this book. To begin, however, we may step back and ask a broader question: how do we respond to a philosophical poem, which puts its claims in the mouth of a goddess, but which also gives pride of place to a pioneering argumentative method of substantiating those same claims? How do we respond to what strikes *us* as a fundamental

[1] The text is cited and translated in Ch. 5.3.