

1 Organizational Remarks

“Time is a child playing a game of draughts. The kingship is in the hands of a child.”

– Heraclitus

This work seeks to lift the veil on the relationship between a monocentric view of the divine and belief in the afterlife. The particular focus is of a paradisaal completion – the alleviation of worldly ethical demand and the fulfillment of imperfect earthly justice. Let us note from the outset that there is a *strong* theological impetus at root in monotheism rather than a *weak* theological understanding of divine potency. In a postmodern theological structure advocating God’s weakness, what is rejected is precisely the prevailing Western understanding of God as primal efficient and final metaphysical power. The historic monotheistic claim to God’s power is vacated; God is without force and does not and cannot intrude on natural events. “The truth of the event does not belong to the order of identificatory knowledge, as if our life’s charge were to track down and learn the secret name of some fugitive spirit.”¹ Such a view, while not fully explored in this volume, would open the floodgate to the possibility of Paradise at all, whether such a God has the sufficient causation to bring things to bear, to bring them beyond themselves into transcendent completion.²

To situate this text, we understand the backdrop of a strong causal-centric God whose transcendence metaphysically assures a Paradisaal realm, and its extended possibility for *knowing* persons through the expiation of guilt by divine judgment. This is crucial to our examination of the underlying hope for Paradise in monotheistic systems. In essence, if there is only one all-powerful Being, God, then all causal structures refer in some fashion to the divine singular existence as ordaining order, as the inescapable beginning and end. We see this strong referential structure in Aquinas’ demonstrations, for example in the order of efficient causes necessitating a first efficient cause.³

¹ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 304.

² Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 205–206: “The arguments for the existence of God neither are arguments nor are they proof of the existence of God. They are expressions of the question of God which is implied in human finitude. This question if their truth; every answer they give is untrue. This is the sense in which theology must deal with these arguments, which are the solid body of any natural theology. It must deprive them of their argumentative character, and it must eliminate the combination of the words ‘existence’ and ‘God.’ If this is accomplished, natural theology becomes the elaboration of the question of God; it ceases to be the answer to this question.”

³ Cf. Aquinas, ST I, 2, 3, *resp*: “There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or only one. Now to

This tracing of monotheism will focus on the Greco-Christian understanding, from the Pre-Socratics, the Greek tragedians, Plato, to the early Christian inheritors of the Greek worldview. The imposition of justice and the expiation of guilt through suffering are necessary prerequisites to our approach to the relationship between Monotheism and Paradise. As such, the three sections are organized to isolate and trace this thread: Section 2: Ideas of the Afterlife in the Greek Tragedians; Section 3: Plato: The Difficulty of Paradise; Section 4: Holiness and Violence: A Christian View of the Resurrected State.

1.1 Framing Remarks on the Pre-Socratics

There is an interpretative lineage, a growing monotheistic emphasis, in the Pre-Socratics. Here are brief framing remarks so that our turn to the tragedians is informed by these historical influences. Aristotle, for example, gives credit to Thales for being the original thinker to ponder what is the underlying or basic substance of the universe.⁴ This direct questioning of primal causation – “the first cause” – of existence by and through which everything else proceeds, is an essential step in influencing the arch of monotheism which wholly characterizes Western civilization. Even Thales’ resolution, water, is suggestive. He knew that whatever the First Cause was had to have some degree of emancipatory power to be unified to everything that followed. This is by no means transcendence, but it gives us a glimmer of a unifying principle that must be immanent in all things and survive that immanence, claiming a nascent filiation with transcendent reality. For Thales, water took on various states. It became vapor when heated and solid when frozen, it could be mixed with the earth, and could gain enough pressure to move the earth; it also provided life, central to the growth of living things. It appeared that water enjoyed a privilege amid all the elements and had the highest hierarchical value; thus it must be the unifying element.

Anaximander sensuously and suggestively provided a true metaphysical nuance to the First Cause, and undoubtedly influenced the Christian understanding of God. In his concept of the *apeiron*, this unifying principle was “the unlimited, boundless, infinite, or indefinite.”⁵ While Thales’ water could not claim a *positive* transcendent value needed for a genuine origin to monotheism, the *apeiron* was far more the irreducible mystery, the indefinite ground prefiguring all grounds, the boundless creative force with the capacity to set order,

take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore, it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.”

⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 983b21. ⁵ Anaximander, Baird, *Philosophical Classics*, 10.

structure, and to be at the helm of the creation, destruction, and recreation of new forms: the limitless not-a-thing. The beginnings of the unifying transcendent agent are present in seedling form. For Anaximander, no first cause could be reduced to a natural element. These elements are created, destroyed, and renewed. Something prior and *other* must be at work. In the *Physics*, Aristotle reflects on Anaximander's vision:

But yet, nor can the infinite body be one and simple, whether it be, as some say, that which is beside the elements, from which they generate the elements, or whether it be expressed simply. For there are some people who make what is beside the elements the infinite substance; for the elements are opposed to each other (for example, air is cold, water moist, and fire hot), and if one of these were infinite the rest would already have been destroyed. But, as it is, they say that the infinite is different from these, and that they come into being from it.⁶

Not being a material element, the *apeiron* is not within the cyclical generation of those things. The boundless is indeterminate and beyond opposition, thus opening the door to the sense of it as impassable and infinite.

Is there a step back taken with Anaximander's student Anaximenes? Did Anaximander make an advance, elevating the primal principle into metaphysical foundation which Anaximenes squanders when he postulates air as the first cause? Perhaps: haven't we gone from a truer comprehensive principle of the boundless no-thing, to a particular that cannot truly raise itself above change? Is this a mere recitation of Thales? But the question for our purposes is what is gained, if anything, in the formation of a monotheism when Anaximenes decides upon air as unifying basic principle of existence. Anaximenes makes an advance over Thales by instituting an explanatory process of observable change. The change, for instance, in the density of air becomes fire. The process of condensation transforms air, and so on. These observable differences to the elements are the product of measurable changes initiating a scientific view. What we may infer is the continued tension between the physical and metaphysical views of existence, as well as the scientific and theological origins. Most critically, the desire to create a bridge within those varying causations that link them, but without sublation and reduction, particularly in a Christian monotheism.

Anaximenes' detailed focus on the quantifiable changes to matter also promotes a worldview of change and flux central to the mystery of a monotheistic God who must be unchanging, eternal, but who causes, as well as endures, otherness and change.⁷ We also see a tension in the oft-paired Pre-Socratic

⁶ Aristotle, *Physics*, 204b22.

⁷ For all of Plato's much emphasized preoccupation with the unworldly form, he knew the problematic bifurcation of *stasis* and flux. In a Christian context, it plagues any thought of Paradise. Cf. Plato, *Parmenides*, 141e: "Then if the one has no participation in time whatsoever,

writings of Parmenides who enshrines the unchanging eternal as the path of the True, opposed to the Heraclitean flux which drew Nietzsche into its suggestive orbit for its culture and religious foundations. One question we must have in the interpretive background is whether any monotheism can genuinely endure otherness and change, or does it alienate and create a false path from the outset preferring a stasis in all arenas opposed to vitality?⁸ “Heraclitus of Ephesus thought that the nature of things was hidden but discoverable, and he chastised those who failed to discern the unapparent in the apparent. We might expect then that Heraclitus would divulge in some way to the hapless many how wisdom is to be got.”⁹ But what informs monotheism more, and perhaps problematically, is the Parmenidean view. Parmenides envisioned that nothing changes in reality; our senses convey the perception of change. “We can speak and think only of what exists. And what exists is uncreated and imperishable for it is whole and unchanging and complete. It was not nor shall be different since it is now, all at once, one and continuous.”¹⁰ If change is an illusion and the essence of reality unifies every human being, to achieve this true reality entices the person into a transcendent or beyond-world search where stasis *as stasis* is experience. The question remains whether this is the path to Paradise outlined by monotheism, and is it one that endures otherness, change? Heraclitus does not diminish change but sees everything changing in time; famously we “do not step into the same river twice.” Forever new waters are always meeting us, and we are changing with them. Such a view lends far more easily to the weak theology of a God not transcendent enough to ensure the expiation of guilt, the demands of justice, or the Paradisal abode available to humanity.

As we continue to scan the land of the Pre-Socratic contributions which lay the groundwork for the architecture of monotheism or, more rarely, reside in tension, as did Heraclitus, we reflect on how this current lends to certain modern predicaments. The offering of transcendent permanence in monotheism, in nascent form in the Parmenidean stasis, always resides in tension with the dynamic overwhelming change of Heraclitean flux. The integrity of the latter dramatically calls into question the possibility of Paradise as a metaphysical

it neither has become nor became nor was in the past, it has neither become nor is it becoming nor is it in the present, and it will neither become nor be made to become nor will it be in the future . . . Can it then partake of being in any other way than in the past, present, or future? It cannot. Then the one has no share in being at all . . . Then it has no being even so as to be one, for if it were one, it would be and would partake of being; but apparently one neither is nor is one, if this argument is to be trusted.”

⁸ Heraclitus, and his great inheritor Nietzsche, evokes the non-way particularity of wisdom as opposed to the dominating unchanging, universalizing Parmenidean way. This non-way appears to be the thread opposing monotheistic currents.

⁹ Pritzl, “On the Way to Wisdom in Heraclitus,” 305.

¹⁰ Velasquez, *Philosophy: A Text with Readings*, 10.

reality. Additionally, the preference for stasis within the strong theological underpinnings of monotheism, appears to resist newness and societal change, advocating a conservatism of norms and traditional practices which do align with, and augment, the view of a transcendent Paradise. Heraclitus' *panta rhei* – “everything is in flux” – had prophetically substituted “God” with “Change.” Existence is the cosmogonic mixing of opposites, the overthrowing of one value for another, the relentless process of destruction and renewal. Change is a violent, seductive, and erotic process of war, strife, power. To accept this reality is wisdom. The historical lineage binding Heraclitus to Nietzsche and into postmodernity involves an allegiance to flux and innovation, which casts its revolution on all facets of society, from ethics to religion, heralding progressivism, and the death of God. While this evokes the resurrection of divine meaning in diverse forms, flux *per se* is too weak for those classic Paradisal promises.

The relational intensity between the demands of permanence and the sheer presence of change, so integral to monotheistic articulations of Paradise, is seen most acutely in the drama of the human soul. The soul that must endure the body and, in some instances – most particularly within Christianity – long for the reunification with that body, so that Paradise, in monotheism, becomes the *only* place where the tensions between stasis and flux are finally resolved, not only in the body, but in justice and redemption. In the Pre-Socratics, we see an inkling of this tension in Pythagoras. For Pythagoras, the perfect symmetry and order of number is the underlying principle of truthful existence. Number calls to mind the step removed from nature which Anaximander's *apeiron* evokes. Mathematical reality has no beginning or ending, it stands apart, preceding the existence of motion and change and all the earthly elements. The soul is viewed as possessing the quality of number, enduring change, and retaining its immortality. The soul for Pythagoras is eternal, passing through a multitude of lives and incarnations, acquiring new knowledge of what it is, in different forms, experienced in diverse ways. This view was a key in forming the Transmigration of Souls which influenced Plato and Neoplatonism, and the underlying predicament of how transcendence relates to immanence. The unresolved issue remains central: how and whether the unchanging divine endures otherness and change, and more radically incorporates this reality in Paradise. This predicament is not only *not* resolved in Pythagoras, but also not resolved in Plato or Aristotle. Its resolution is a critical piece in the puzzle of a comprehensive view of Paradise formed under one God, one which espouses the metaphysics of endurance and permanence yet one carefully attuned to the individual and unrepeatable, the qualities essential to persons in flux. Is the dignity of the individual able to be preserved in a monotheistic view of Paradise where the hegemony of the divine prefers universal and eternal categories?

The Pythagorean soul implies an underlying governing force from which each soul proceeds, and returns to, after death. But it is Xenophanes who fleshes out this elusive set-apart governance. Although Pythagoras brings us to a sense of salvific endurance through truth, still the unifying power is left undefined, the radicality of its transcendence and otherness to all things is not clarified. It is Xenophanes who gives us the monotheistic God, against the many anthropomorphised versions. “There is one god, among gods and men the greatest, not at all like mortals in body or in mind. He sees as a whole, thinks as a whole, and hears as a whole. But without toil, he sets everything in motion by the thought of his mind.”¹¹ Here we see that the origins of monotheism strike at the very heart of the human person and the ratification on a metaphysical level of that Pre-Socratic poetic immortality which raises us above the animals. With Xenophanes we see more clearly that the drama of the human person is at stake in a monotheism which *must* offer Paradisal fulfillment. His primal spiritual Other, clearly irreducible to anything in the world, has the power to set things in motion; its agency as indivisible whole enables this originating process. The fulfilling truth we seek, truth suggestive of Paradisal completion, demands knowledge beyond us, a capacity to experience wholeness beyond us: “The truth is that no man ever was or will be who understands the gods and all I speak of. If you stumble on some rocks of the whole truth you never know it. There is always speculation.”¹² Beings are set in motion and proceed along this course through decay, atrophy until death. Xenophanes suggests a reuniting with the creative force, but is it a surrendering, a disengagement, an absence of knowledge on the part of the human who stumbles on earth to know, and more often than not makes gods in his own image? In surviving fragments, Xenophanes clearly is striking at the difference between gods made in man’s image versus a creative power *beyond* image.

Man made his gods, and furnished them with his own body, voice, and garments. If a horse or lion or a slow ox had agile hands for paint and sculpture, the horse would make his god a horse, the ox would sculpt an ox. Our gods have flat noses and black skins say the Ethiopians. The Thracians say our gods have red hair and hazel eyes.¹³

While we have a glimpse of the hegemonic transcendent power which may inhabit a Paradisal abode, we do not have human epistemological participation in it. Our participation is reductive, counterfeit even, made in our image, unable to endure Being *beyond* image, that boundless infinity of the *apeiron*. Can we know Xenophanes’ God who is entirely beyond change? God “sees all over, thinks all

¹¹ Xenophanes, Baird, *Philosophical Classics*, 18.

¹² Xenophanes, Baird, *Philosophical Classics*, 19.

¹³ Xenophanes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 43.



Figure 1 Trojan Horse.JPG, by Carol Scott

over, hears all over. He remains always in the same place, without moving; nor is it fitting that he should come and go, first to one place then to another. But without toil he sets all things in motion by the thought of his mind.”¹⁴

2 Ideas of the Afterlife in the Greek Tragedians

“He steered the mortal mind to thought, making one law: suffer and learn. Drop by drop on hearts in sleep falls pain, remembering woes; and so to the unwilling comes wisdom when it comes. Violent is the grace of powers at the terrible helm.”

– Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*¹⁵

“Behold me, princes of Thebes, the last daughter of the house of your kings, see what I suffer, and from whom, because I feared to cast away the fear of Heaven!”

– Sophocles, *Antigone*¹⁶

¹⁴ Xenophanes, Robinson, *An Introduction to Early Greek Philosophy*, 53.

¹⁵ Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 174–79. ¹⁶ Sophocles, *Antigone*, 940–43.