‘Jewish Monotheism and Pre-Socratic Philosophy: Early Christian Perspectives’

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It is a commonplace view in the modern study of the Old Testament that ‘monotheism’ arose late in ancient Israelite religion. This theology, seemingly untypical in antiquity, is usually explained by various developmental factors, above all by the Babylonian Exile as the political crisis that precipitated the need for a theological response to enable the exiled Judeans to make sense of their suffering, and to provide hope for the future: one God remained supreme in spite of circumstance. This view has sometimes carried with it the suggestion that there were parallel theological developments of a similar kind among the 6th-5th Centuries BC Pre-Socratic or early Greek philosophy/ers (hereafter EGP/s) whose extant fragments also seem to attest an untypical assent to one supreme deity from within a traditionally polytheistic society. EGPs reacted, to some extent, against the older mythic poetry of Homer and Hesiod and anticipated the classical philosophy of Plato and Aristotle; they are, thus, prime examples of development.

The comparative suggestion itself has been made on the basis of a number of observations: the critical dating of the most explicitly monotheistic OT texts (above all, Deutero-Isaiah) to the 6th Century BC, when the new theologies of EGP also emerged; the presence of Greeks in Babylon (according to the Weidner tablets, ANET 308b) with whom Jews might have interacted; the shared impact of political change across the Near East, including eastern Greece (i.e. Ionia), following the meteoric rise of the Persian Cyrus, which led to fresh cultural exchanges; and hypotheses about the development of ancient thought, in particular Karl Jasper’s notion of an Axial Age as a period of intellectual ferment and progress as represented in both Greek and Jewish thought c. 500 BC.[1] Each of these observations, whose explanatory force is questionable, naturally requires separate treatment.

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[1] Lohfink 1969: 63 wrote: ‘...monotheism proper emerged in Israel not before new theoretical insights into the divine world were discovered in other parts of the ancient world. Zoroaster in Persia and the pre-Socratic philosophers of Greece are Deutero-Isaiah’s contemporaries.’ (quoted in Lang 1983: 46-47). In a more apologetic vein, Whitley 1957: 144-45 wrote: ‘...cosmological discussions were a feature of contemporary thought, that the Ionians were concerned with the search for the First Cause, and that Zoroastrianism accounted for the presence of good and evil in the world by the postulate of a Dualism of

But the main purpose here is to consider the evidence on which the supposition of monotheistic parallels is based, as found in early Christian texts whose writers were among the first to propose such parallels, even if on the basis of quite different assumptions. There are three sections: (1) EGP in early Christian texts (which will be summarised briefly during the presentation); (2) testimonia in defence of monotheism; and (3) concluding reflections.

1. *EGP in early Christian writings*

The content of EGP has not been preserved in original manuscripts but in the writings of later authors from the Classical, Hellenistic and Roman periods: in Greek (e.g. Plato, Aristotle, Aëtius, Diogenes Laertius, Plutarch) and then in Latin (e.g. Cicero, Seneca). To the extent that it can be established by the standard critical means, this textual tradition contains original quotations and arguments amidst the later evaluations and uses of its content.[2] The early Christians, who composed in these languages, not only made use of this tradition but also augmented it with material not attested elsewhere. However, their interaction with that tradition raises crucial issues about the manner of reportage by groups with alternative and often tendentious agendas.[3] But it should at least be observed that early Christian writers were perfectly capable of describing in a neutral manner the historical importance of EGPs as individuals in historical succession and as founders of

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Light and Darkness. It is probable, however, that Deutero-Isaiah was not only acquainted with such speculations, but was also aware of the difficulties inherent in them; for he solved the Ionic problem of creation by claiming that Yahweh is the sole Creator and Controller of the universe, and the Zoroastrian problem of good and evil by his representation of Yahweh as Lord also of the realms whence moral and related problems arise...'.

2 For a useful introduction to EGP sources see Mansfeld 1999.

3 The early Christians made use of the full range of the available sources (classical philosophy, commentary, successions, biography, doxography). This included serious philosophical discussion and legendary biographical materials; the latter contained tales of virtue (used as analogies in defence of Christians) and tales of vice (contrasted with ideal forms of Christian behaviour). On the former, see Irenaeus Heres. 1.25; Tatian Addr. 2-3, 19, 25; Theophilus Auto. 3.5, 7; Tertullian Marcion 1.1; Origen Cels. 2.43; 3.51; Lactantius Inst. 3.23, 25; 3.23; Epit. 38, 39; Clementia Recog. 5.18; Arnobius Heathen 2.13; Eusebius Const. 9; Jerome Ep. 66.8; 79.9; 76.2; 109.2; Jerome Vigil. 4; Gregory Eps. 3.2.1; 135.1; Cassian Conf. 5; Chrysostom 1 Tim. 1 1; Augustine City 14.20. On the latter, see Justin Apol. 1.46; 2.8; Athenagoras Plea 31; Clement Instr. 2.11, 3.9; Strom. 1.16; Tertullian Apol. 39, 46; Martyras 4; Origen Cels. 3.54; 5.41; 7.41, 63; 8.28, 30, 35; Arnobius Heathen 1.14; Lactantius Inst. 3.3; Epit. 33; Jerome Virg. 2.7, 14; Jerome Ep. 48.13; 52.15; 58.5; 60.5, 12; 79.9; Jerome Pamm. 38, 39; Jovin. 2.9, 11, 14, 33; Gregory Or. 7.10; 27.9; Ambrose Clergy 2.4; Virgins 4.17; 5.34; 12.80; 13.83; Chrysostom Widow 4; Augustine City 8.3; Trinity 13.5.8.

philosophical schools who exercised a major and long-lasting influence on Greek history and culture.[4] Indeed, some early Christian writers (e.g. Hippolytus) have provided very important sources for the modern reconstructions of EGP.

If the historical importance and influence of EGP was acknowledged by early Christian writers how then did this fit into their historical and theological perspectives, nurtured by the biblical texts as their primary sources for ancient history? This raises the question of the origins of Greek philosophy from an apologetic standpoint; in other words, how could the significance of EGP be accepted, and yet contained? Broadly speaking, early Christians, following in many respects the apologetic strategies of their Hellenistic Jewish predecessors (i.e. Ps.-Aristeas, Aristobulus, Philo and Josephus) accounted for EPG as a part of Greek philosophy in three main ways.

First, the philosophers arrived at truth because they had used the writings of Moses. They either stole his truthful ideas, or their false ideas indicated they had misunderstood, changed or rejected his teachings. The argument from historical priority had been used in Ptolemaic period claims for the priority of Egypt over Greece, putting to good effect the reports that Plato and Pythagoras had visited Egypt. Jews and Christians employed a variant of it: philosophers had read the writings of Moses in Egypt; or they had available to them pre-LXX translations of them (cf. Aristob. fr. 3). The philosophers might have had other intermediary barbarian teachers, but as a bringer of culture Moses, and before him Abraham, had greater antiquity.[5] As an inheritor of this apologetic tradition, Augustine wrote:

> In the time of our prophets, then, whose writings had already come to the knowledge of almost all nations, the philosophers of the nations had not yet arisen, - at least, not those who were called by that name, which originated with Pythagoras the Samian, who was becoming famous at the time when the Jewish captivity ended. Much more, then, are the

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[4] Justin Dial. 2; Clement Strom. 1.19; Tertullian Apol. 2; Nationes 1.4; Origen Cels. 1.43; 3.25; 5.54, 77, 89, 97; Cyprian Ep. 75; Lactantius Inst. 3.2, 6, 14, 16; 5.8; 6.24; 7.1; Theodotus Excerpts 32; Hist. 4.7; Jerome Apol. 3.29, 39, 40; Ep. 48.19; 66.11; 107.6; Pelagians 2.6; Galatians Preface; Gregory Or. 2.7; 7.20; Basil Hom. 1.10; Augustine Ep. 137.12; Conf, 3.5; 5.19; City 5.2, 5; 8.4; 9.4; 22.8; Trinity 14.2; Faustus 33.6.

[5] Justin Apol. 1.23; 54-60; Hort. 12, 14, 19; Tatian Addr. 36-41; Clement Strom. 1.14-15, 21-22; 5.8-11; 6.3, 7; Cohort. 6; Tertullian Apol. 47; Nationes 2.2; Origen Cels. 1.15; 4.51; 6.12, 13, 43; Hippolytus Ref. 9.22; 10.36-37; Lactantius Inst. 4.2; Eusebius Const. 17; Hist. 1.2; 9; 10; Jerome Ep. 53.1; Ambrose Clergy 1.10.31; Augustine City 18.24, 25, 37; CD 2.28 (although see the moderating remarks at 8.11, on the chronology of Jeremiah and Plato); Socrates Hist. 1.19; 2.24; Theodoret Hist. 3.16.

other philosophers found to be later than the prophets. For even Socrates the Athenian, the master of all who were then most famous, holding the pre-eminence in that department that is called the moral or active, is found after Esdras in the chronicles. Plato also was born not much later, who far out went the other disciples of Socrates. If, besides these, we take their predecessors, who had not yet been styled philosophers, to wit, the seven sages, and then the physicists, who succeeded Thales, and imitated his studious search into the nature of things, namely, Anaximander, Anaximenes, and Anaxagoras, and some others, before Pythagoras first professed himself a philosopher, even these did not precede the whole of our prophets in antiquity of time, since Thales, whom the others succeeded, is said to have flourished in the reign of Romulus, when the stream of prophecy burst forth from the fountains of Israel in those writings which spread over the whole world. So that only those theological poets, Orpheus, Linus, and Musæus, and, it may be, some others among the Greeks, are found earlier in date than the Hebrew prophets whose writings we hold as authoritative. But not even these preceded in time our true divine, Moses, who authentically preached the one true God, and whose writings are first in the authoritative canon; and therefore the Greeks, in whose tongue the literature of this age chiefly appears, have no ground for boasting of their wisdom, in which our religion, wherein is true wisdom, is not evidently more ancient at least, if not superior. Yet it must be confessed that before Moses there had already been, not indeed among the Greeks, but among barbarous nations, as in Egypt, some doctrine which might be called their wisdom, else it would not have been written in the holy books that Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, as he was, when, being born there, and adopted and nursed by Pharaoh's daughter, he was also liberally educated. Yet not even the wisdom of the Egyptians could be antecedent in time to the wisdom of our prophets, because even Abraham was a prophet. And what wisdom could there be in Egypt before Isis had given them letters, whom they thought fit to worship as a goddess after her death? Now Isis is declared to have been the daughter of Inachus, who first began to reign in Argos when the grandsons of Abraham are known to have been already born. (*City* 18.37)

This kind of account, by far the most frequently used, explains why in early Christian writings there are often sections devoted to the demonstration of both the chronological priority of the Jews and their wisdom, as this example from Augustine amply illustrates, and of Greek borrowings or misuses of biblical texts.

Secondly, the philosophers arrived at truth because they exercised, through contemplation and conjecture, the natural reason or universal logos within humanity created in the image of God. This argument was an adaptation, in conjunction with Genesis 1 and 2, of the Stoic and/or middle Platonic doctrine of the *logos spermatikos* as an explanation for the religious knowledge that all of humanity naturally possesses. The

naturally gifted philosophers were also a special instance of this, and even beneficiaries of divine inspiration and revelation.[6] Justin Martyr wrote:

> But lest some should, without reason, and for the perversion of what we teach, maintain that we say that Christ was born one hundred and fifty years ago under Cyrenius, and subsequently, in the time of Pontius Pilate, taught what we say He taught; and should cry out against us as though all men who were born before Him were irresponsible - let us anticipate and solve the difficulty. We have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared above that He is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived reasonably [*meta logou*] are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them; and among the barbarians, Abraham, and Ananias, and Azarias, and Misael, and Elias, and many others whose actions and names we now decline to recount, because we know it would be tedious. (*Apol*. 46.1-3)

This kind of account was not, however, put to extensive explanatory use, because philosophy had become diverse and contradictory: its original and pure unity had been lost - a complaint in some strands of Hellenistic philosophy, which was in turn adapted by some early Christian theologians as an analogy for the resurgence of heresies (pagan ideas in disguise) that polluted the pure fount of truth. Moreover, only some philosophers had, to varying extents, exemplified the logos in their lives and teachings. Rather, this account was an argument against the pagan charge of Christian novelty, as this example illustrates: the logos (Christ) had already been active in the history of the world.

Thirdly, the philosophers arrived at truth because fallen angels, through sexual intercourse with mortal women, had transmitted to the nations the heavenly secrets of philosophy. This account combined the episode of Genesis 6:1-4 about the 'sons of God' and its extension in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition concerning the acquisition of certain *technai* unsuited to mortals (1 En. 6-11) with Greek Academic critiques of the demonic in Greek religion.[7] Clement of Alexandria wrote:

> But philosophy, it is said, was not sent by the Lord, but came stolen, or given by a thief. It was then some power or angel that had learned something of the truth, but abode not in

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[6] Justin Apol. 1.5, 46, 63; 2.8, 10, 13; Athenagoras Plea 6, 7; Clement Strom. 1.26; 1.87, 94; 5.10, 13, 29, 87, 94; 6.17, 55; 2.100; 5.13; 6.58; Exhort. 2.25.3; 6.68; 7.74; Lactantius Inst. 2.10; 3.9, 12, 28, 30; 4.2; Minucius 19.

[7] Justin Apol. 2.5, 13; Clement Strom. 1.67, 81-87; 5.10; 6.157; 161.2-6; 7.6. It is also used by Tatian , Athenagoras, Tertullian and Minucius.

it, that inspired and taught these things, not without the Lord's knowledge, who knew before the constitution of each essence the issues of futurity, but without His prohibition. (*Strom*. 1.17)

This account was usually used by Christians to point to the demonic origin of Greek religion in general, but, as this particular example illustrates, it was also adapted to account for the divine origin of philosophy as such, which was, after all, held in high regard by some early Christian writers: philosophy was a *techne* that, in due time, had brought many benefits to humankind.

These three accounts, which gave philosophy a place in ancient Israel's traditions about its origins, might indicate that EGP could and even should have served as a major repository of truth; instances of EGP testimonia for belief in one God (discussed below) were held by early Christian writers to be a very fine case in point. But before analysing some of this evidence, it is important to mention general objections levelled by early Christian writers against EGP and its legacy, so that the mixed nature of its reception is borne in mind. There were three, broadly speaking: the philosophical, the theological, and the Christian.

EGPs proposed new cosmologies that could be classified as 'physical' theologies (distinct from the mythic theology of the poets, and civic religion), in which observable physical processes took on a prominent role in rational explanations of the cosmos and its emergence; in the quotation above Augustine calls them 'physicists'.[8] Theology was sometimes a part of these explanations: a divinised, motive element, a guiding supreme intelligence, or a world soul. The first objection against these new opinions was the sheer amount of disagreement among its philosophers: it made EGP contradictory at root (cf. Josephus Ap. 2.179-181).[9] Indeed, Greek philosophical tradition already contained critiques of specific EGPs that could be turned against them.[10] Moreover, as subsequent

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[8] For this threefold classification of religion by the Roman antiquarian M. Tarentius Varro, see Tertullian Nationes 2.2; Augustine City 6.5; cf. Clement Exhort. 4.46-64; 5.64-6.72; 7.73-76.6.

[9] Justin Hort. 3, 5; Tatian Addr. 2-3, 25; Theophilus Auto. 3.2, 7; Clement Exhort. 5; Strom. 6.17; Tertullian Apol. 47; Nationes 2.2; Tertullian Soul 2-3; Hippolytus Ref. 1.8; Arnobius [...]; Lactantius Inst. 3.17; 5.3; Clementia Recog. 8.15; Chrysostom Acts 6; John 63.3; Augustine City 18.41). Note: early Christian writers were thus able to contrast EGP with the enduring legacy of Christ. Clement Strom. 6.17; Origen Cels. 1.29; 2.3; 5.20; 7.66; 8.45; Chrysostom Corinth. 7.12; 8; Augustine Gos. 1.12; cf. Origen Cels. 5.57; 6.8)

[10] Lactantius Inst. 2.10; Augustine Ep. 102.13, 14; 118.24-26, 27-29; Conf. 10.9; City 8.2, 9.

Greek allegorical explanations of them suggested, their ideas seemed to be the doctrines of the old, mythic poets in physical dress: they were not new at all.[11]

The physical character of EGP theology also made it susceptible to the suspicion that the separation of God and matter, an axiomatic feature of Jewish and Christian views of creation, had been collapsed: EGPs were guilty of an idolatry of matter; if divinity was part of and subject to physical processes then this ruled out its worship.[12] Another aspect of this second objection was that, in the search for physical cosmologies, divine providence was often downplayed or denied (especially by the atomists), earning some of them the title 'atheist' (unlike Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, with whom philosophically minded Jews and Christians felt more at home).[13] There was also, among some early Christian writers, something of a Job-like response to speculative postulations about origins on the basis of observable phenomena in the present: the cosmological opinions extrapolated from them were incapable of demonstration. Only faith with wisdom could be the foundation of true theological knowledge.[14]

The identification of differences between Christian doctrines and EGP was the third, and most distinctive, objection. Heresies were seen to be EGP in new disguise: the theologies of the Gnostics, Marcion and the Manicheans were traced to the dualisms of Pythagoreanism and Empedocles.[15] Accordingly, Tertullian remarked: 'The philosophers are the patriarchs of the heretics' (Hermog. 100.9). The emergent 'orthodox' doctrine of the Trinity, in particular the meaning of 'nature', also had to be distinguished from these physical theologies.[16] Another concern was views of the afterlife: the Christian insistence on the resurrection of both the body and the soul did not equate to the immortality of the transmigrated soul of Pythagoreanism.[17] And finally, despite its historical importance and

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11 Justin Hort. 3; Irenaeus Heres. 2.14.2-6; (Clement Strom. 1.1.

12 Tatian Addr. 16; Athenagoras Plea 22; Clement Exhort. 5, Strom. 1.1; Tertullian Nationes 2.3-6; Marcion 1.13.

13 Origen Cels. 4.25; Lactantius Inst. 1.2; 7.3, 7; Anger 9, 10; Arnobius Heathen 1.13; Chrysostom 1 Tim. 1 12); Dionysus 2.5; Athanasius Syn. 35.

14 Theophilus Auto. 3.2; Clement Strom. 2.4; 5.1; cf. 1.15; Arnobius Heathen 2.9, 10.

15 Irenaeus Heres. 1.1; 2.14; Clement Strom. 4.22; 6.4; 6.16; 7.6, 16; Tertullian Apol. 47; Marcion 1.13; 2.28; Heretics 7; Tertullian Valent. 15; Fasting 15; Hermog. 100.9; Hippolytus Ref. 4.13, 51; 5.2, 8, 11, 15; 6.4, 6, 16, 17, 18-50; 7.17, 18-19; 8.8; 9.2-5, 9, 12; Archelaus Disput. 51; Alexander Manich. 6; Jerome Ep. 133.1, 2, 3; Jovin. 2.21; Rufinus Apol. 2.7; Augustine Ep. 118.2; Greg. Naz. 41.2.

1616 Basil Ep. 8.2.

17 Justin Dial. 6, Apol. 1.18, Resurr. 2; Tertullian Apol. 48, 50; Test. 4; Tertullian Soul 5, 9, 14, 15, 17, 28-35, 51, 54; Resurr. 1; Minnucius Octavius 34; Origen Cels. 1.32; 3.80; 8.53; Hippolytus Ref. 9.22;

influence, EGP did not, as Augustine maintained, contribute a doctrine of salvation (while that was not its purpose), even if, on the basis of the three accounts of its origins, EGP contained traces of truth with which Christian writers could and did agree.[18]

2. *Testimonia in defence of Monotheism*

Some of the Christian writings of the first three centuries or so contain the testimonia of ancient Greek poets and philosophers who are there said to have taught that God is one, a unity or first principle.[19] These testimonia were deployed for a number of reasons: to show that illustrious Greek thinkers supported Jewish and Christian monotheism against polytheism and idolatry; to rebut the charge of atheism levelled against religiously exclusive Christians by pointing out that there were famous Greek thinkers who supported their theology (and had been similarly mistreated by governmental authorities in their day); and to argue for the truth of Christianity with recourse to revered, ancient authorities, especially if their own sacred scriptures could not be admitted in debate. The quotation of philosophers was seen to be particularly useful, since their activity was concerned with the investigation of the truth and reality as such. For present purposes, three examples of this deployment are worth exploring.

2.1. Heraclitus

If attack is the best form of defence, then a good number of early Christian writings often began with critiques of the gods of popular polytheism, as a means to argue, in turn, for the superiority of monotheism. EGP witnesses were invoked to assist in two main ways. The quotations of philosophers provided analyses that, learned from Moses, enabled the charge of idolatry and ignorance; a more potent form of this criticism was that the gods

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Lactantius Inst. 3.18, 19; 7.7, 8, 12, 13, 23; Socrates Hist. 3.21; Jerome Virg. 2.6; Jerome Ep. 60.4; 124.4, 7; 126.1; Jerome Vigil. 1; Jovin. 2.6, 7; Rufinus Creed 39; Chrysostom John 2.3, 5; Augustine Ep. 165.1.

[18] Augustine Ep. 102.13, 14; 118.24-26, 27-29; Conf. 10.9; City 8.2, 9.

[19] Justin Hort. 19; Ps. Justin Gov. 2; Athenagoras Plea 6; Clement Exhort. 6; Strom. 5.14; Minucius Octavius 19; Lactantius Institutes 1.5; 2.9; Epitome 4; Anger 11.

were in fact demons.[20] Philosophers' quotations also provided analyses of the origins and development of religion as a human phenomenon that reduced its beliefs and practices to anthropomorphic superstition; moreover, the gods' all too human behaviour prompted cries of shame and subversive mockery.[21] Some of the EGPs had, as a result, turned to forms of atheism, although this was also connected to their naturalistic philosophies.[22] The first example is one of these critiques, taken from Origen's *Contra Celsus*, which preserves much of Celsus' series of attacks on Christianity, as well as Origen's counter-responses. Celsus is reported as follows:

> Heraclitus also says in one place: 'Persons who address prayers to these images act like those who speak to the walls, without knowing who the gods or the heroes are.' And what wiser lesson have they to teach us than Heraclitus? He certainly plainly enough implies that it is a foolish thing for a man to offer prayers to images, whilst he knows not who the gods and heroes are. This is the opinion of Heraclitus; but as for them, they go further, and despise without exception all images. (*Cels*. 7.62, tr. Crombie)

Celsus had already quoted Heraclitus to show that the Christian objection to images was not new at all: it was a common opinion; to which Origen responded that, like morality, certain ideas are implanted by God (1.15). In this passage Celsus takes up the topic again, reporting that Christians 'cannot tolerate temples, altars, or images', and lists those of a similar mind from history: Scythians, the nomadic tribes of Libya, the Seres, 'some other of the most barbarous and impious nations in the world', the Persians, and Heraclitus. But Celsus' actual point is that it is *only* foolish to pray to images *as if* they are the gods and heroes: viewed in this way, Heraclitus provided a rationale or account (i.e. logos) for the proper use of images. This interpretation fits with what is known of Heraclitus, who made use of observations that exemplified his philosophy of cosmic unity in opposition: the instance of the material images of the immaterial gods and heroes was most likely one of

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[20] Clement Strom. 1.15; cf. 5.1; 5.5; 5.11 (cf. DL7.33); Origen Cels. 1.5; 7.62, 65-66; cf. 6.12, 13. On demonology, see Athenagoras Plea 23-24, Clement Exhort. 10.

[21] Athenagoras Plea 23-24, 28; Clement Exhort. 2, 4, 5; Strom. 7.4; Tertullian Apol. 11, 14; Nationes 1.10; 2.2; Minnucius Octavius 21; Origen Celsus 6.42; Socrates Hist. 3.23; Arnobius Heathen 3.16; 5.29; Athanasius Heathen 18.

[22] Clement Exhort. 2; Tertullian Scorpiace 15; Minnucius Octavius 8; Origen Celsus 5.11; Dionysus Nature 5; Arnobius Heathen 4.29; Chrysostom Corinthians 4.9; Augustine Petilian 3.22-26.

these.[23] Origen was left to retort that the gods of the nations are 'demons', and that, guided by the strictures of Jewish and Christian monotheism, the worship of God just could not be combined with the use of images (7.65). It seems, then, that an EGP witness might not assist Christian apologetic; evidence had to be interpreted correctly for that to be the case.[24]

2.2. Xenophanes

The next example is taken from the *Stromateis* ('Miscellanies' or 'Patchworks') of Clement, whose purpose was to overturn the criticism of Celsus or his like, who argued that both the Jews (who, though peculiar, at least had antique customs) and especially the more recent Christians (who are hardly monotheists anyway) taught a distorted and counterfeit version of the most ancient theology of the time-honoured nations, and best represented by the Greeks.[25] Clement's *Strom*. 5.14 contains an extensive list of up to fifty named poets and philosophers, often with quotations from them (Plato most of all), that were collated to demonstrate its opposite: the Greeks had used, paraphrased or misused the older Jewish scriptures.[26] After listing them, Clement maintains that the testimonia demonstrate that God is apprehended by all; that 'equal natural righteousness

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[23] Osborne 1997: 92-93. Even though most suppose an authentic core, there are critical problems with the reconstruction of this fragment. For discussions, see Marcovich 1967, Kahn 1979, Robinson 1987 and Osborne 1997.

[24] For more blatant instances of interpretative latitude see Clement Exhort. 6; Octavius 19; Lactantius Inst. 1.5; cf. 2.9; Epitome 4; Anger 11.

[25] For salient remarks, see Origen *Cels.* 1.14-16, 21-24; 5.5, 33-34; 8.2, 12. Celsus states: 'The goatherds and shepherds who followed Moses were deluded by clumsy deceits into thinking that there was only one god, and without any rational cause they abandoned the worship of many gods. These goatherds and shepherds thought that there was one god called Most High, or Adonai, or the Heavenly One, or Sabaoth, or however they like to call this world; and they acknowledge nothing more. But it makes no difference whether one calls the supreme god by the name used among the Greeks, or by that, for example, used among the Indians, or by that among the Egyptians '(Origen *Cels*. 1.23-24 (quoted in Droge 1989: 78-79); cf. 5.14). For the philosophical background, see Ps.-Ar. *De Mundo* 398b; Max. Tyr. 39.5; cf. 2.5; Dio Chrys. 31.11; and discussions in Chadwick 1953: xix-xx, and Droge 1989: 78-80, on a pagan 'qualitative' monotheism (i.e. philosophical polytheism) rather than the 'quantitative' insistence of Jewish and Christian monotheism. For Clement's response, on the incantatory power of individual names, see *Strom*. 5.45; and an earlier response to philosophical polytheism, on the foolishness and injustice in offering to the 'meaner' what belonged to the 'superior', see Philo *Decal*. 61.

[26] Clement refers directly to the same approach of Aristobulus and Hecataeus of Abdera from whom some of the material (also used by other apologists) was derived; on which, see Inowlocki 2006.

reached all', both Jew and Greek, as the Old and New Testaments teach.[27] As for the philosophers, their knowledge was limited unless they had been 'instructed by us', and so they only knew God by a 'true periphrasis'. It is in 5.14 that the famous 'monotheistic' lines of Xenophanes are first attested:

[Xenophanes of Colophon, teaching that god is one and without body, asserts:]
One god is greatest among gods and men,
not at all like mortals in body or in thought.

[And again:]
But mortals suppose that gods are born,
wear their own clothes and have a voice and a body.

[And again:]
But if horses or oxen or lions had hands
or could draw with their hands and accomplish such works as men,
horses would draw the figures of the gods as similar to horses,
and the oxen similar to oxen,
and they would make the bodies
of the sort which each of them had. (*Strom*. 5.14; tr. Lesher)

The lines are in a list of quotations from fourteen poets and philosophers, each concerned in various ways with divine incomparability.[28] This sub-section, accordingly, begins with lines from Isaiah ('To whom have you likened me? says the LORD' 40:18, 25; 46:5), which Clement initially describes as a 'prophetic utterance' that the Socratic Antisthenes had 'paraphrased', with a quotation of his to show this to be so; and the rest are listed to bear out the same claim.

However, there are forgeries in the list: some of the obviously spurious quotations (e.g. from Sophocles, cast in the manner of an Old Testament prophet railing against idolatry at the Greek theatre) are recycled in Ps-Justin *De Monarchia*, and most likely stem from a Jewish or Christian florilegium. And the same objection has been levelled against the famous lines attributed to Xenophanes, on the basis of meter, vocabulary and

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27 Clement quotes the 'apostolic word' (Rom. 3.29) and that which was proclaimed 'prophetically' beforehand (Isa. 36:7, 8, 10; Jon. 1:6, 9, 14; Mal. 1:10, 11, 14).

28 Antisthenes, Xenophon, the Sibyl, Xenophanes, Bacchylides, Cleanthes, Sophocles (twice), Heraclitus (twice), Melanippides, Parmenides, Hesiod and Euripides.

ideas.[29] For instance, the very Jewish and Christian sounding 'one God [*heis theos*]' is otherwise unattested among ancient philosophers: the early doxographers imply that Xenophanes would have preferred the alternative neuter 'one [*hen*]'; and yet, they also ascribe to him the monotheistic argument that no god can be subjected to another, as these lines nevertheless seem to allow ('greatest among gods and men').[30] To frustrate matters further, Aristotle complained Xenophanes had not made his own sense of 'one' clear.[31] It should be emphasised that divine incomparability is not in question here, even if the evidence on the kind of oneness Xenophanes had in mind is unclear. But even if these lines do betray a later Jewish or Christian hand, they are certainly not as spurious as those of Sophocles (whose quotations have no precedents). It is also worth remembering another facet: Clement's strategy was the listing of testimonia that demonstrated a 'true periphrasis' of the knowledge of God; the alignments of Greek with OT texts, as in the case of Antisthenes and Isaiah, and Xenophanes in tow, are only ever of a general kind.[32] Otherwise, the admittedly slippery argument that the Greeks used, paraphrased or misused the Jewish scriptures could not have retained its apparent force.

2.3. Pythagoras

Quite apart from the general objections made by Christians against Pythagoreanism, whether as paganism or in its heretical guises, the frequency and significance of the number 'one' as a cosmological fundament in Pythagorean tradition made it both inviting and amenable to apologetic discourse.[33] Following Hellenistic Jewish apologetic, in this

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29 See especially Edwards 1991:223, and *passim*.

30 Ps.-Aristotle *MXG* 3, 4; Simplicius *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 22.22ff.; Ps.-Plutarch *Miscellanies* 4. For translations, see Lesher 1992:204-210, 212-213.

31 Ar. Meta. 1.5, 986b. Yet another characterisation, which implies the deity is a world soul, is found in the early Christian writers Hippolytus: 'And he affirms that nothing is generated or perishes, or is moved; and that the universe, being one, is beyond change. But he says that the deity is eternal, and one and altogether homogeneous and limited, and of a spherical form, and endued with perception in all parts'. (*Ref.* 1.12)

32 Clement Strom. 4.3; 5.11, 12; Instr. 2.10; Tertullian Apol. 21; Origen C. Cels. 1.15; Lactantius Inst. 4.9.

33 On the various uses of Pythagoreanism in early Christianity see Jáuregui 2010.

regard, there are numerous instances in early Christian writings.[34] The third and final example, from Ps. Justin's *Exhortation to the Greeks*, was probably composed in the 3rd Century AD.[35]

His biographers point out that Pythagoras, son of Mnesarchus, who explained his own philosophical conclusions by means of mystical symbols, seems to have harboured thoughts about the unity of God, which may have been a profitable result of his sojourn in Egypt. He allegorically teaches that there is one God when he states that unity is the first principle of all things and the cause of all good. This becomes more evident from his statement that unity and one differ greatly from each other. He claims that unity belongs to that class of beings which are perceived by the intellect, whereas one belongs to the class of numbers. Now, if you wish a more explicit proof of the monotheism [*henos theou*] of Pythagoras, listen to the following quotation:
'God is one. And He is not, as some think outside the world, but in it, for He is entirely in the whole circle looking over all generations. He is the blending agent of all ages; the executor of His own powers and deeds; the first cause of all things; the light in heaven; the Father of all; the mind and animating force of the universe; the motivating factor of all the heavenly bodies.' Such is the testimony of Pythagoras. (*Exhort.* 19; tr. Falls)

The opening lines reflect the usual apologetic motif (cf. 10, 14), on the basis of legendary Hellenistic biography, that Pythagoras had learned in Egypt (Diod. 1.96-98; Plut. *De Is.* 354e-f), and, according to Jewish and Christian writers, had made use of Moses' writings, even with the assistance of pre-LXX translations of them. It is worth observing that this author is evidently reticent about making easy equations between the opinions of Moses and Pythagoras ('seems', 'allegorically', cf. 28, 32, 34) because of what were known to be Pythagoras' 'own philosophical conclusions' (cf. Aristob. fr. 4). The lines on Pythagorean doctrine that follow thereafter similarly reflect Hellenistic Ps-Pythagorean doxography, even if some of its ideas have traces in earlier Pythagoreanism.[36]

A slightly variant form of the quotation itself had already been used by Clement (Exhort. 6; and it was later copied by Cyril of Alexandria *Adv. Julian* 17) who attributed

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[34] Ps.-Justin 2; Athenagoras Plea 7; Clement Strom. 4.3 (with Deut. 6:4; but see 'Timaeus' *Brill's New Pauly* 2009: v. 14, 678, on the inauthentic, late work of Timaeus the Locrian, quoted by Clement); 5.14 (cf. DL 1.12; Hippolytus Ref. 1.2; 6.23; Ps.-Galen Hist. 35; Epiphan. Fide 9.

[35] For the reasons see Marcovich 1990: 3-4. The work's testimonia of poetry is a valuable source for knowledge of the Jewish and Christian Greek Pseudepigrapha of the OT.

[36] For line 5 (Marcovich 1990: 49) see Aët. 1.7.18 (Ps.-Plut. Epit. 1.7; Stobaeus Ecl. 1.1). For lines 6-8 (Marcovich 1990: 49) see the near-identical 'Life of Pythagoras' §3 (Guthrie 1987: 137) preserved by the 9th Cent. Photius, which Theiler 1965:209ff. (cf. Burkert 1972: 52) traced to the circle of the Middle Platonist Eudorus of Alexandria (1st Cent. BC). Riedweg 1994:361 suspects Ps.-Justin knew Porphyry's 'Life of Pythagoras'. For the similar expressions in early Pythagoreanism see Riedweg 1994: 364.

it to the 'Pythagoreans', and used it as the final piece of evidence in a chapter on the divine inspiration of the philosophers that enabled them to discover some truth.[37] Ps.-Justin might have got the quotation from Clement, or from a common source. Its actual provenance is unclear: it lacks distinctive Jewish and Christian hallmarks (so is probably not their forgery), and is most likely from Hellenistic Ps-Pythagorea, which was usually in the Doric dialect, as is most of this example. Each of the statements in the quotation has parallels in this late tradition, and traces in early Pythagoreanism, as well as reflexes in Hellenistic Jewish texts whose writers treated Pythagoreanism.[38] This third example, then, invites the complaint of a lack of authenticity on two fronts: it was not from the hand of Justin (a less serious objection), and it hardly contains the words of Pythagoras, but largely late Pythagorean tradition.

3. *Concluding Reflections*

The early Christian use of EGP in defence of monotheism is something of a mixed bag: a fragment of Heraclitus that retains an authentic core was incorrectly interpreted by Origen; the 'monotheistic' testimonia of Xenophanes used by Clement probably preserve something authentic but were seemingly filtered through a Jewish or Christian lens; and Ps.-Justin drew upon Hellenistic Ps.-Pythagorea, late traditions whose connection with their founder was already uncertain, if not untraceable. Modern critical observations about testimonial authenticity such as these are legitimate because of what the Jewish and Christian apologists claimed that they demonstrated, and they are rightly criticised on these grounds, although this should be tempered by the recognition of the pseudepigraphical nature of some of the sources that were available to them.

But it is important to remember the use to which the testimonia were actually put: early Christian writers rarely, if ever, claimed that the parallels they were drawing were exact: the testimonia served a general purpose. The latitude of some early Christian uses of EGP make this evident: it was enough for an EGP statement that spoke of God in

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37 For the linguistic differences in the quotations see Riedweg 1994: 364-68.

38 For details see Riedweg 1994: 360-368. For the statement 'God is one' see Philolaus (5th Cent. BC) in Philo Opif. 100, but Onatas of Tarentum (5th Cent. BC?) in Lydus Mens. 2.12 (Thesleff 1965: 140); and Onetas *De Deo* in Stobaeus Anthol. 4.2.19 (Thesleff 1965: 139, 11). For the Pythagorean texts see Thesleff 1965: 105, 139, 140.

terms of one, a unity or first principle, for it to be a witness to truth. Indeed, the apologetic claim, that EGP was a dim reflection of a greater light, allowed for that latitude. And it must also be remembered that the apologetic arguments, which show a creative use of OT texts with currents in Hellenistic culture, were traded back and forth in a historical context in which greater antiquity carried immense weight, and whose use would not, therefore, have been seen as questionable in principle.

Finally, on comparisons between this and the use of EGP testimonia in modern developmental accounts of the emergence of monotheism, it is important to draw a basic lesson from the observations made here: the supposed parallels do not equate easily, even if the desire to draw them might make them do so. The main difference between early Christian and modern developmental perspectives on Jewish monotheism and EGP is that the former deployed the entire biblical tradition in its defence, whereas the historicism of the latter reduces the number of textual sources available for argument. Apart from that, they are both general accounts whose actual significance, when compared, is primarily ideological: that is their force and their appeal.

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