

EPISTEMIC NOTIONS OF XENOPHANES: A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

N. RAMTHING

I

The antiquity of epistemological inquiry dates back to ancient times, and it was initiated by Xenophanes, who defended mortal inquiry against supernatural intervention. However, the notion of Xenophanes is seldom explored in relation to human understanding. He is mostly known for his radical religious reappraisal of Homeric religion. Cicero believes that Xenophanes is the only philosopher among the most ancient thinkers who, while he was a proponent of the existence of the gods, "did away with divination from its very foundation."¹ Xenophanes' radical religious view relies on the nascent epistemological foundation, which recognises the limitations of human reason to what mortal minds can and cannot know. According to C.M. Bowra, Xenophanes is responsible for one of the most "far-reaching revolutions which have ever taken place in human thought."² In a very credible development of Xenophanes' epistemology, Karl Popper argues in his final philosophical works that F34 comprises both a theory of truth and a "theory of objective knowledge."³ Barnes thought of Xenophanes as a brilliant, original, and sophisticated talent.⁴ Richard attributes Xenophanes as the "father of epistemology who is also partly responsible for the birth of western philosophy."⁵

Some of the most fundamental epistemological questions such as —How much can any mortal being hope to know?" —Does truth come to us through our own efforts or by divine revelation?" —What role do our sense faculties play in the acquisition of knowledge?" were basic and fundamental, yet they had never been the focus of enquiry prior to Xenophanes. Xenophanes' insightful enquiry into human understanding, along with his recognition of human epistemic limitations and their

¹Tor, S., (2017) "Xenophanes on Divine Disclosure and Mortal Inquiry", In *Mortal and Divine in Early Greek Epistemology: A Study of Hesiod, Xenophanes and Parmenides*, Cambridge Classical Studies, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp, 104-154.

² C.M. Bowra(1960) *Early Greek Elegists, Barnes and Noble*, New York, p.116.

³ Karl R. Popper (1998) *The World of Parmenides*, Routledge, London, p. 47.

⁴ Barnes, J., (1979) *The Presocratic Philosophers: Volume 1, Thales to Zeno*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 84.

⁵ Richard D. McKirahan, Jr.,(1994) *Philosophy Before Socrates*, Hackett Pub., Co., Indianapolis, pp. 66 and 68.

significance, runs deeper than has been previously recognised. But some philosophers, like W. K. C. Guthrie, hesitate to call Xenophanes a philosopher.⁶ He is occasionally portrayed as a religious reformer.⁷ Nevertheless, one must acknowledge Xenophanes' belief in human growth, as articulated in F18, which unequivocally attests to the potential for knowledge acquisition through inquiry and investigation. The interpretation of Xenophanes' understanding of the unknowable aspects of truth in F34 is thought to be either a precursor to philosophical scepticism or an indication of fallibilism; however, further philosophical exploration of this subject is beyond the scope of this paper. Understanding Xenophanes' epistemic concepts necessitates grasping his speculative theological reasoning, as these two lines of thinking are not only coherent but also somewhat interdependent.

This paper aims to present the epistemic notions hitherto unknown until Xenophanes. Xenophanes of Colophon (570-470) was a man who lived during the late 6th and the early 5th centuries BCE. He was not just a mere rhapsode nor a minstrel but a philosophically minded poet (also known as an itinerant poet) who lived in various parts of ancient Greece. Jaeger, in his work, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, calls Xenophanes an "intellectual revolutionary"⁸ and argues against those who would think of him as a rhapsode.⁹ Despite disagreement among thinkers regarding his sway in epistemology or in philosophy, one thing remains undisputed: that he was the first to question the religious notions of the Greek gods, who, according to the recorded works of Homer and Hesiod, did things "that are blameworthy and disgraceful for men: stealing, committing adultery, deceiving each other (F12)." The genesis of the tussle between religion and philosophy begins with Xenophanes. Xenophanes' critique of the anthropomorphic physical and mental traits attributed to Greek gods, his arguments against the immoral behaviour of Homer's gods, and his innovative thoughts on the limitations and fallibility of human understanding were all rich, resourceful, and revolutionary, anticipating future

⁶ W. K. C. Guthrie (1962) *A History of Greek Philosophy*, University Press, Cambridge, p. 362.

⁷ W.T. Stace (1920) *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy*, Macmillan Co. & Ltd, London, p. 42.

⁸ Jaeger (1967) *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, University Press, 12 Oxford, p. 41.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

questions about human knowledge. The main argument of this paper, aligned with the aim mentioned above, is that his writings first conceived and sowed the "seed"¹⁰ for epistemology. However, his true identity as an original thinker is best understood through his fierce criticism and broad reevaluation of religious ideas presented by Homer and Hesiod, which were underpinned by his epistemic understanding.

Xenophanes made explicit philosophical statements about human knowledge and was the first to draw clear limits upon human knowledge. Xenophanes' epistemological limits are partially founded on his awareness of the diversity of human thinking and his achievement of a unified understanding of the nature of the divine and the prospects for human knowledge. It will not be out of place to state that his epistemic notion was an outgrowth of empirical observation, mainly because of his intellectual piety. Despite acknowledging the limitations of human knowledge, Xenophanes maintains an intellectual piety that does not completely eliminate the possibility of knowing. His views were shaped by his religious and culturally cosmopolitan experiences, as well as the partial foundation of his religious reappraisal. Understanding Xenophanes' epistemic notions without encountering his theology is challenging because his theological perspective highlights the limitations of human knowledge. One could argue that the denial of divine revelation as it relates to human knowledge is the origin of human inquiry. His broad religious reevaluation and epistemological concern are not at odds. His epistemic notions cannot be understood without the harmonic explanation between the two.

It's challenging to appreciate Xenophanes's contributions to epistemology, mainly because there are various opinions on his relevance in Greek philosophy, partly due to the meagre number and diversity of original fragments available. Moreover, the testimony of the doxographers does not provide a detailed account of the shortage of original manuscripts. Understanding his epistemological dilemma requires carefully examining the distorted, disorganised, and contradictory mythologies prevalent in his day.

¹⁰The term 'seed' is used to mean that Xenophanes is the founder of what is known as epistemology.

II

The concepts found in Fragments 18, 34, 35 and 38 pertain to Xenophanes' epistemology. These fragments constrain the present analysis, as they are incredibly insightful and creative in producing a fully formed notion of what Xenophanes believed to be the limits of human comprehension compared to divine knowledge.

Xenophanes' comment F 18:

The gods have not revealed all things to men from the beginning, but by seeking, they find in time what is better.¹¹ Fragment 18 presents an optimistic perspective on the possibilities of knowledge and strikes at the root of the idea of divine "intimations to mortals." —"indeed the gods did not reveal all things, are we to imagine that they might have revealed a few? If indeed the gods did not reveal all things at the outset, are we to understand that they might have revealed some things later on?"¹² Since the first line disproves a claim of divine revelation, it is unclear whether Xenophanes intended to exclude the gods completely from scientific inquiry or merely to limit their influence over human affairs. On the other hand, is negation always equal to everything? Using a new tack, Leshner finds four grey areas in this paragraph. Concerning (i) the timing and nature of any revelations from the gods to humans, (ii) the possibility that our progress is aided by the divine, (iii) the exact meaning of 'in time' (often translated as 'at length'), and (iv) the consequences of our findings, Xenophanes is ambiguous. Scholars agree that Xenophanes flat-out rejects the idea of revelation, saying that the gods have never shared any secrets with humans.

However, some believe Xenophanes acknowledges that the gods occasionally show certain things. All scholars agree, therefore, that the negation in F18 presents two markers, one about the time dynamic of revelation and the other about the quantity of disclosure. These remarks sound more optimistic when he sets aside divine revelation in favour of a form of 'seeking' that leads, in time, to the discovery of 'something better.' In addition to supporting research on natural events,

¹¹ John Burnet (1920) *Early Greek Philosophy*, Adam & Charles Black, London, p.119.

¹² —"Xenophanes on Inquiry and Discovery; An Alternative to the 'Hymn of Progress' Reading of Fr. 18" in *Ancient Philosophy 11* (1991) p. 152

Xenophanes appears to favour self-discovery over reliance on supernatural disclosers. Therefore, if we must hold that Ionian science was the precursor to the thought process that produced our current scientific understanding of reality, then we should consider Xenophanes' encouragement of Milesian inquiry in F18 to be one of the watershed moments in the development of Western thought, less a well-known early declaration of faith in science and more a major turning point in the history of humankind.¹³ To put it in perspective, this aligns with Xenophanes' passage, which refers to empirical inquiry as a means to achieve a better understanding. Nevertheless, it is not certain whether empirical inquiry surely leads to what we may call knowledge or whether it could be understood as getting closer to knowledge in the human endeavour to know better. The passage thus indicates the element of the empirical line in seeking better knowledge, but does such an empirical line warrant recognising Xenophanes as an empiricist? Hermann Frankel argues that Xenophanes is an empiricist. However, he does not offer an exact explanation of what he means by empiricism in this context; he argues that Xenophanes confidently bases himself on experience, believing that it alone is reliable.¹⁴ Frankel maintains his argument by stating that 'Xenophanes characterises as certain and exhaustive only that knowledge that is empirically grounded.'¹⁵

Xenophanes' comment on knowledge F34:

And indeed no man has been nor will there be one
 Who knows (eidos) what is clear and certain [to saphes]
 About the gods and such things as I say about all things.
 For even if, at best, one were to succeed in speaking of what is brought to pass
 Still he himself would not know. But opinion [dokos] is fashioned for all.¹⁶

This fragment is viewed as an expression of a robust empiricism. It holds that knowledge which is empirically grounded, based on first-hand observation and

¹³ Ibid.,

¹⁴ Frankel, H. (1974) 'Xenophanes' empiricism and his critique of knowledge (B34)', In *Mourelatos, A.P.D. (ed.), The pre Socratics: A collection of critical essays*. Princeton University Press, pp. 118-134.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁶ Edward Hussey (1990) 'The Beginning of Epistemology: From Homer to Philolaus', In *Epistemology*, ed. Stephen Everson, *Companions to Ancient Thought*, Vol. 1, 11-38, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 11-32.

experience, can be certain and exhaustive.¹⁷ These remarks set limits on how much any mortal being can know, in the process drawing the fundamental distinction between knowledge and mere true opinion. The sceptics of the fourth century BCE immediately seized upon these remarks, anticipating their belief in the unacquired nature of knowledge. Sextus mentions two contemporary perspectives.¹⁸ Initially, it was assumed that Xenophanes implied that nothing is comprehensible and that no one is aware of this, which he reportedly discovered by chance. We resemble individuals searching for gold within a dimly illuminated chamber filled with a variety of valuable objects. Some individuals will succeed in acquiring it, but they will lack any means to verify their discovery. Therefore, philosophers may uncover unexpected insights into their lives through the pursuit of truth. In his second chapter, Sextus mentions people who interpret him differently. They contend that rather than eliminating all comprehension and standards, he is replacing knowledge with opinion as a standard of judgment. It would be best to accept what is likely but never rule out the potential for error.¹⁹ Xenophanes was philosophically aware of the human/god distinction, which was present in all Greek poetry. There was a commonplace of poetry that humanity had no sure knowledge, as Guthrie remarked.²⁰ This is expressed in invocations to the Muses, and elsewhere.²¹ He quotes Heraclitus: "human nature has no insight, but divine nature has."²²

The primary message of F34, from its opening to —noman” to its concluding phrase —fashioned for all”, would have been that there never has been and never will be anyone who can possess certain knowledge concerning all these important but ultimately unobservable matters. Fragment F34 then repeats the familiar refrain that while mortals may discover much about matters lying within the circle of their daily experiences, knowledge concerning events or circumstances in distant places and times must exceed their grasp. Nevertheless, Xenophanes’s allocation of human

¹⁷ Frankel, H. (1974) —Xenophanes’ Empiricism and His Critique of Knowledge (B 34)” in *Mourelatos*, *The Pres-Socratic*, 118-31.

¹⁸ W. K. C. Guthrie (1962) *A History of Greek Philosophy*, University Press, Cambridge, pp. 395-96.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*,

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 398

²¹ *Ibid.*,

²² *Ibid.*,

awareness to the category of “~~o~~pinion” or “~~e~~onjecture” is not an inherently dismissive characterisation, unlike the Platonic standard.²³

Xenophanes' comment F 35:

Let these be taken as fancies, something like the truth.²⁴

This fragment suggests a duality in human understanding between mind's conjectures and the pursuit of truth, which, in other words, can be said to be both a human cognitive and a metaphysical aspect of reality. Let us accept this as being “~~i~~ke” reality, or as a valid conjecture of it. This implies, as Popper points out, that there is a reality, a “~~r~~uth” with which we are in touch, but we may not have the experience or opportunity to verify our “~~e~~onjectures.”²⁵ Xenophanes undoubtedly draws a distinction between the limits of mortal knowledge and the superiority of God's knowledge, and he evidently conceptualises the latter in light of the former. The implication that we mortals cannot know 'about gods' suggests that Xenophanes likely recognises mortal epistemic constraints in F34 through an implicit contrast with the divine, a view shared by both ancient and modern readers of the fragment. The idea that the divine is cognitively superior to the mortal coexists with Xenophanes' ideas on the cognitive differences between the two (F23). However, for Frankel, human opinion is not necessarily untrue; it simply never reaches the status of certain knowledge unless accompanied by perceptual experience. Direct experience would be necessary and even sufficient to acquire knowledge.²⁶

Xenophanes' comment F 36:

All of them that are visible for mortals to behold.²⁷

Xenophanes' naturalistic views of the cosmos are alluded to in the fragment. By stressing the “visible for mortals to behold,” Xenophanes argued that even miraculous occurrences like rainbows and the sun are just part of the natural,

²³ J.H. Leshner (2009) “The Humanizing of Knowledge in Presocratic Thought”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy*, Patricia Curd (ed.), Daniel W. Graham (ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.468-69.

²⁴ John Burnet, (1920) *Early Greek Philosophy*, Adam & Charles Black, London, p.121.

²⁵ Karl R. Popper (1998) *The World of Parmenides*, London: Routledge Pub., p. 46.

²⁶ Frankel, H. (1974) “Xenophanes' Empiricism and His Critique of Knowledge (B34)” in *Mourelatos*, *The Pres-Socratic*, p. 128.

²⁷ John Burnet, (1920) *Early Greek Philosophy*, Adam & Charles Black, London, p.121.

observable universe, not manifestations of divine will. The statement highlights that these are natural events that humans can observe, unlike the hidden, mysterious nature of divine truth. However, everyone may indulge their imagination. Xenophanes believed that humans are limited to seeing "things as they appear" (F36), and not things in themselves. It is essential to note that Xenophanes distinguishes between what is perceived and what is real. Xenophanes understood the limits of sense experience and its influence on reason. Xenophanes saw his own search for truth gain modest ground, and acknowledged that his pursuit for truth was not the whole truth, but what is given to mortals is the visible. Xenophanes realised that humans could never reach an infallible understanding of truth, particularly in the arena of non-evident metaphysical matters (F34).

Xenophanes' comment F 38:

If god had not made brown honey, men would think figs far sweeter than they do.²⁸

The fragment, which is about figs and honey, could have been interpreted in a somewhat broader context, suggesting that no human decision of any kind, including perceptual judgements, can be completely devoid of subjective bias. Osborne interprets Xenophanes F38 as saying If the god had not made yellow honey, they would have said that figs were much sweeter, saying, '[W]e would not be well placed to judge the sweetness of figs on an accurate scale if we had no experience of the greater sweetness of honey. We would overestimate figs, taking them to be the sweetest thing there is.'²⁹ Consequently, we are left with incomplete information when we conduct object comparisons. We could only learn about the sweetness of figs, honey, and other things if we had tasted them. Although it is theoretically feasible to have all conceivable experiences, it is impossible for humans to actually experience all that is available. We can only experience what is presented to us and not anything beyond that.

Conversely, Tor astutely observes that F38 commences by asserting that God had created golden honey. Tor says that Xenophanes argues that if we hadn't tasted

²⁸ Ibid.,

²⁹ Osborne, C. (2004) *Presocratic philosophy: A very short introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

honey, we would have different ideas about figs and sweetness.³⁰ Furthermore, Tor asserts that in F38, Xenophanes goes beyond simply acknowledging that the available evidence limits our judgements. The fragment reflects a more general point regarding the relationship between the beliefs and conjectures we develop based on the diverse experiences that the divine presents to us. If God had not facilitated the specific experiences that he did for any mortal, or if he had facilitated alternative experiences in addition, the judgments of that mortal may have been different.³¹ Therefore, Tor posits that divine disclosure is present, albeit not in the manner that Lesher claims Xenophanes denied. Put differently, the gods do not reveal their knowledge to mortals through divination. Rather, the gods provide humans with knowledge through the process of creation and existence in general, ensuring that mortals have the necessary experiences to accurately compare and evaluate them, thereby arriving at knowledge. Tor would be considered an empiricist, similar to Frankel, because his interpretation of F38 suggests that Xenophanes also viewed himself as an empiricist who believed that certain knowledge could be attained through the assistance of the gods. In summary, Xenophanes presents an uncertain view of the future of human knowledge: while people will eventually "discover better" through their extensive seeking, no one will ever truly know a certain thing, at least not about subjects outside of our direct experience.

Furthermore, it is evident from F34 that he sometimes pondered how the opinions he voiced in one domain related to claims made in another. He considers, for instance, the degree to which any mortal creature has the potential to know the unwavering truth with regard to "certain knowledge about the gods and about all the things I speak of " (F34) or, to put it differently, the extent to which his epistemological conclusions influence the results of his religious and epistemic studies. Being aware of the difference between human and divine abilities, Xenophanes' epistemology, which holds that the only things we mortals can know for certain are what happens to us and what we are presented with during our brief lives, makes it challenging to remain sceptical of his position. Everything else must remain up for debate or speculation. Moreover, the level of comprehension we are able to

³⁰ Tor, S. (2013) *Mortal and divine in Xenophanes' epistemology*, Rhizomata, 1:248- 282.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

achieve will only be attained gradually over time, through our efforts and pursuits, leading to the discovery of something better.

III

Xenophanes saw his search for truth gain modest ground; for him, humans could never reach an infallible understanding of truth, particularly in the arena of non-evident metaphysical matters. The one element that most epistemological interpretations of Xenophanes have in common is a conviction that he expresses doubt about the clarity and capacity of human understanding. This is obviously the case with those who would call him a sceptic, and equally clear in those who see the metaphysical contrast between reality and appearance. Xenophanes does make a distinction between common belief and reality. This is a significant insight that often divides philosophical thought from other forms of writing. Almost all of his contributions can be traced to this one revolutionary thought: things aren't as they seem. Whether in the arena of the gods or in science or in anthropological insights. He understands that things are not as they may seem to the common person. He has reason to know that things are different. The contrast for him between what is commonly thought and what he thinks is true is often quite stark. No human being sees anything as it really is, and all that we call truth is, to a varying degree, a human construct. Human constructs are almost always fallible.

Xenophanes emphasises the importance of careful speculation and rejects the careless acceptance of common opinions. His epistemology will discourage a blind or even facile acceptance of experience or tradition, but encourage the pursuit of understanding with the hope of reaching verisimilitude between his beliefs and reality. In F18, it is mentioned, 'Not from the beginning did the gods reveal all things to mortals, but in time they determine what is better by seeking.' Though the gods possess knowledge, they do not merely hand it over to man; rather, man progresses by himself, by working at it. We are gradually moving towards improvement by seeking, investigating, searching, and giving careful thought, not by appeals to authority (F10). What is better lies hidden but can be discovered if we look for it: the better is a buried treasure, to be unearthed by minds, not by hands and spades. His views on human opinion and knowledge need careful attention. For Xenophanes, men should think for themselves, not depend upon authority. Men speculate constantly, and while they

should try to do so with care, it is quite possible for them to speculate incorrectly. Careful thought and planning are necessary if men are to achieve the good in their personal lives. Though the gods possess knowledge, they do not merely hand it over to man; neither is man progressing but himself, by working at it. We are gradually moving towards the better (more useful) by seeking, investigating, searching, and by careful thought, not by appeals to authority (F10). What is better lies hidden, but it can be discovered if we look for it: the better is buried treasure, to be unearthed by minds, not by hands and spades.

Humans predominantly dwell within the realm of opinion, a concept articulated and apprehended by Xenophanes, who contrasted opinion with knowledge. Opinion, for Xenophanes, serves as a pathway to the truth while acknowledging that knowledge is approached with clarity and consistent intellectual effort. At the same time, Xenophanes views speculation as a worthwhile human duty, crucial for gradual progress, which is achieved through the relinquishment of authority and reliance on divine revelation, oracles, and similar sources. The human mind is not inerrant: many errors have been made in the past by men who were too ready to accept authority (as that of Homer) or too prone to be impressed by names (as Iris) rather than the true nature of things. However, humans can make progress when they carefully speculate, striving for clarity, reality, and an understanding of how things evolve and develop in the universe. Man's most useful possession is his mind. His understanding of human knowledge was grounded in the attempt to broaden experience and in the effort to engage critical faculties to identify things like consistency and cultural anomalies. It is with Xenophanes that the divine-human knowledge gap takes on a different slant. We may not have certain knowledge, but we do have hope of knowing better, and we have no need for divine revelation to help us in this regard. Reason and observation will take the place of oracles and divination. Xenophanes does not conclude with cynicism or reject the potentiality of human discovery.

It is to be made clear that Xenophanes does not endorse blind acceptance of experience, but he advances an earnest pursuit of understanding, fostering harmony between personal beliefs and reality. He reframes the divine-human knowledge gap as a source of hope for improved understanding, favoring reasoning and speculation

over divine guidance. The advancement of human knowledge relies upon the diligent inquiry of individuals, as expressed in F18, emphasizing that knowledge is discovered gradually through effort rather than handed down by divine entities. It is important to note that Xenophanes does not necessarily reject the possibility of any kind of knowledge but rather reproves dogmatism and acknowledges boundaries of the dimension of human knowledge. Although our epistemic status is limited, we can still form opinions and enquire about various things. As Pickering notes, Xenophanes is a natural epistemologist who claims that statements concerning the non-evident realm of the divine, as well as the far-reaching generalisations of natural sciences, cannot be known with certainty but must remain the object of opinion.³² Although Xenophanes discourages a blind or facile acceptance of experience or tradition, he encourages the pursuit of understanding with the hope of achieving serenity between his beliefs and reality.

Xenophanes advocates the notion that the pursuit of knowledge resembles the discovery of concealed treasure, attainable solely by the attentive intellect. And in the pursuit better understanding, Xenophanes regarded the mind as more significant than the body. The mind controls the body, both in the individual and in the universe. Mind is useful to man: his mind speculates on the data of sense and, in the course of time, gradually finds what is better because more useful. The human mind is inerrant: many errors have been made in the past by men who were too ready to accept authority (Homer) or too prone to be impressed by names (Iris) rather than the true nature of things. However, progress is possible when humans speculate carefully, aiming for clarity, reality, and understanding of how things develop and grow. Man's most useful possession is his mind, and mind is likewise the distinguishing characteristic of the highest god. Xenophanes suggests that humans are free to decide on when and how to acquire knowledge without the gods' inspiration and participation. Knowledge is not considered a gift or stroke of insight; it takes time for people to gain some new knowledge. There is no guarantee that progress will yield the truth. He indicates that the process of acquiring only reveals what is close to the truth. Thus, the path to knowledge is not instantaneous; it involves persistent curiosity and the application of reasoned thought to achieve a closer approximation of truth.

³² Pickering, F.R. (1993) "Xenophanes." *The Classical Review*. Vol.43, No. 2. 1993: 232-233

IV

Conclusion

Xenophanes occupies a relatively small space in the discourse of Western philosophers. Even when mentioned, the comment is more often made about a literary poet or a rhapsode than as a thinker. The same is true with Aristotle, as he comments that Xenophanes can be “completely ignored” as being “somewhat too crude.”³³ Based on the discussion that follows, it is plausible to assert that Xenophanes made an essential contribution to epistemic discourse and that his ideas, underlying human knowing, no matter how trivial, cannot be discarded. His distinction between knowledge and belief, along with his argument that human initiative and inquiry are the only legitimate paths to the truth makes his views significant and distinct. Though he doubted that mortals could discover the whole truth, like traditionists, he did think that they might discover something that was nearly true, as some knowledge belonged to the gods. His ground-breaking study of the conditions under which people can become conscious of a particular reality is arguably Xenophanes' most important philosophical contribution. The distinction Xenophanes made between what constituted “truth” and what was essentially opinion remains central to the epistemological debate. Undoubtedly, Aristotle and all the other Greek philosophers attempted to address the central question raised in Xenophanes' F18, 34, and 35: how can anyone truly claim to have discovered the truth about subjects that fall outside the scope of direct observation, considering the extremely limited scope of human experience? Xenophanes' capacity to broaden the scope of subjects deemed suitable for philosophical inquiry and debate is another noteworthy quality. It is undeniable that Xenophanes was a complex thinker who had a profound impact on many aspects of subsequent Greek philosophy, despite scholars disagreeing about many of his beliefs.

I concur with what J.H. Lesher considered: that gods did not reveal everything to mortals, and some things are not revealed at all. However, the revelations, no matter how small, cannot be negated, as they were sourced from the

³³Aristotle(1993) *Metaphysics*, Loeb Classical Library, University Press, Harvard.

gods. How much of what we know is revealed is a matter that eludes human understanding. F34 clearly states that no man has nor will there be one who knows what is clear and certain about the gods and such things as I say about all things.³⁴ For even if at best one were to succeed in speaking of what is brought to pass, still he himself would not know. But opinion is fashioned for all. What is given to mortals is conjecture and not certainty. However, there is also no denying the possibility of reaching upon certain truths, yet no mortal can be so certain of such arrival of the truths. The elementary idea of how mortals have to foray into the resources of nature is the crux of Xenophanes' epistemology. This is quite complementary to the world of science. Ever since the dawn of human enquiry into the nature of the earth, starting from Thales to the present time, there has been one line of commonality in our exploration. Mortals do not stop exploring nature just because there is no certainty. The question of reaching the truth, that is, certainty, is a matter of exploration into the given natures as resources. Water, as was believed by Thales, was the only substance of the universe, a partial truth which was supplemented with other substances as well in the process of mortal exploration.

The approach to the idea that the Earth was flat was a moment of truth for a certain period, but the certainty of it soon disappeared as exploration heightened the accuracy of our discoveries. Human exploration led to a deeper comprehension of the Earth's spherical shape. Time has demonstrated to humanity that humans are inferior chess players, whereas artificial intelligence surpasses them as a superior adversary. Still, mortals' prominence is not exempt from exploitation; their research helps us gain a more profound understanding. Nevertheless, this better discovery can be quickly forgotten when it encounters mortals through exploration over time. All this exploration by mortals is possible because we possess faculties that are well suited for the exploration. But who has been given the equipment of rational faculties is the question where we fumble with eternal impossibilities to be certain about; even if the moment of success brought to pass, still, we mortals would not know. However, mortals are aware that explorations lead to better discoveries. The approach, which originated in the idea of Xenophanes, opened ample windows of possibility for

³⁴Edward Hussey (1990) "The Beginning of Epistemology: From Homer to Philolaus", In *Epistemology*, ed. Stephen Everson, Companions to Ancient Thought, Vol. 1, 11-38, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 11-32.

discovery through exploration over time, rather than embracing and becoming entangled with what is unknowable to mortals. The belief in human progress through exploration of the universe has led to advances in human understanding of the world. Xenophanes' epistemic notion and that of his contemporaries traced the genesis of human progress towards better discoveries. Although controversial and inconclusive, a substantial amount of testimony and a few surviving fragments suggest that Xenophanes was familiar with and attempted to further the ideas presented by the Milesian philosopher-scientists Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes. Although the specifics of his scientific beliefs remain largely unknown, he played a pivotal role in the development of Ionian scientific theory because of the breadth and depth of his interests.

It was the Ionian science that laid the groundwork for how people thought about the world, ultimately leading to modern scientific understanding. If this hypothesis is true, then Xenophanes' support for the Milesian inquiry in F18 should be considered one of the turning points in the history of Western thought, more of an example of human progress than a famous early expression of faith in it. He believed that individual endeavours should achieve human progress rather than relying on divine revelations and a comprehensive inquiry can reveal the concealed excellence, facilitating progress in human pursuits of knowledge, which is his original, indelible contribution to the realm of epistemology. Hence, Xenophanes' epistemic notion will foster the quest for understanding with the hope of reaching verisimilitude between beliefs and reality.

References:

- Aristotle (1993) *Metaphysics*, Loeb Classical Library, University Press, Harvard.
- Barnes, J., (1979) *The Presocratic Philosophers: Volume 1, Thales to Zeno*, Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- C.M. Bowra (1960) *Early Greek Elegists*, Barnes and Noble, New York.
- Edward Hussey (1990) –The Beginning of Epistemology: From Homer to Philolaus”, In *Epistemology*, ed. Stephen Everson, *Companions to Ancient Thought*, Vol. 1, 11-38, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Frankel, H. (1974) –Xenophanes' empiricism and his critique of knowledge (B34)”. In *Mourelatos*, A.P.D. (ed.), *The pre-Socratics: A collection of critical essays*. Princeton University Press, 118-134.
- Jaeger (1967) *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, University Press, Oxford.

- J.H. Lesher (1991) "Xenophanes on Inquiry and Discovery: An Alternative to the 'Hymn to Progress' Reading of Fr. 18", in *Ancient Philosophy 11*, Mathesis Publications.
- J.H. Lesher (2009) "The Humanizing of Knowledge in Presocratic Thought", in *The Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy*, Patricia Curd (ed.), Daniel W. Graham (ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- John Burnet, (1920) *Early Greek Philosophy*, Adam & Charles Black, London.
- Karl R. Popper (1998) *The World of Parmenides*, Routledge, London.
- Osborne, C. (2004) *Presocratic philosophy: A very short Introduction*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pickering, F.R. (1993) "Xenophanes." *The Classical Review*. Vol. 43, No. 2. 1993: 232-233
- Richard D. McKirahan, Jr.,(1994) *Philosophy Before Socrates*, Hackett Pub., Co., Indianapolis.
- Tor, S. (2013) *Mortal and divine in Xenophanes' epistemology*, Rhizomata 1:248-282.
- Tor, S., (2017) "Xenophanes on Divine Disclosure and Mortal Inquiry," In *Mortal and Divine in Early Greek Epistemology: A Study of Hesiod, Xenophanes and Parmenides*, Cambridge Classical Studies, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp, 104-154.
- W. K. C. Guthrie (1962) *A History of Greek Philosophy*, University Press, Cambridge.
- W.T. Stace (1920) *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy*, Macmillan Co. & Ltd, London.