1. Euripides’ Reputation

Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae* 450-2

A widow complains that her living (στεφανηπλοκοῦσα, weaving garlands for the gods) is in jeopardy because of Euripides:

> νῦν δ’ οὗτος ἐν ταῖσιν τραγῳδίαις ποιῶν
> τοὺς ἄνδρας ἀναπέπεικεν ὅσι εἶναι θεούς·
> ὧστ’ ὤσκετ’ ἐμπολῶμεν οὐδ’ εἰς ἠμισυν.

But now he makes his tragedies, and he has men persuaded that there are no gods, so that our trade is down to less than half!

Aristophanes, *Frogs*

Aeschylus calls Euripides θεοῖσιν ἐχθρέ (936), and we get this list of Euripides’ alternative deities (888-94):

ΕΥ. Καλῶς· ἕτεροι γάρ εἰσιν οἷσιν εὐχομαι θεοῖς.

ΔΙ. ἰδιοὶ τίνες σου, κόμμα καινόν;

ΕΥ. Καὶ μάλα.

ΔΙ. ἵθι δὴ προσεύχου τοῖσιν ἵδιωταις θεοῖς.

ΕΥ. Λιθήρ, ἐμὸν βόσκημα, καὶ γλώττης στρόφιγξ καὶ μυκτῆρες ὁσφραντήριοι, ὀρθῶς μ᾽ ἐλέγχειν ὧν ἂν ἀπτωμαι λόγων.

Ether, my food; Pivot of my tongue, Comprehension, and Nostrils keen to scent [Lefkowitz]

2. The Sophist Prodicus on the Gods

Prodicus, 8485 DK, lines 13-17

Π. δὲ ὁ Κεῖος “Ἦλιος, φησί, καὶ σελήνην καὶ ποταμοὺς καὶ κρήνας καὶ καθόλου πάντα τὰ ϒφελοῦντα τὸν βίον ἠμῶν οἱ παλαιοὶ θεοὺς ἐνόμισαν διὰ τὴν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ὄρφελιαν, καθάπερ Αἰγύπτιοι τὸν Νεῖλον,” καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τὸν μὲν ἄρτον Δήμητραν νομίζων, τὸν δὲ οἶνον Διόνυσον, τὸ δὲ υδρὸς Ποσειδώνα, τὸ δὲ πῦρ Ἡφαιστον καὶ ἃ δὴ τῶν εὐχρηστοῦντων ἕκαστον.

The ancients thought that the sun and moon and rivers and springs and in general everything that helps out our life were gods because of the help they received from them, as the Egyptians call the Nile a god, and on account of this they called bread Demeter, wine Dionysus, water Poseidon, fire Hephaestus, and every useful thing [by the name of a god]. [Lefkowitz]
3. Euripides, *Hercules Furens*

Eur. *HF* 339-47 (Amphitryon)

Αμ. ὢ Ζεῦ, μάτην ἢ ὧν ὀμόγαμὸν σ’ ἐκτησάμην, 

μάτην δὲ παιδὸς κοινεὼν ἐκλήξομεν· 

σὺ δ’ ἢθ’ ἢ ἢσσον ἢ δόκει σ’ εἶναι φίλος. 

ἀρετῆι σε νικῶ θητός ὡν θεὸν μέγαν· 

παιδὰς γὰρ ὡς προούδωκα τοὺς Ἡρακλέους. 

σὺ δ’ ἔσ μὲν εὐνάς κρύφιος ἡπίστω μολεῖν, 

τάλλοτρα λέκτρα δόντος οὐδενὸς λαβών, 

σώιζειν δὲ τοὺς σοὺς οὐκ ἐπίστασαι φίλους. 

ἀμαθής τις εἶ ἢ θεὸς ἢ δίκαιος οὐκ ἐφύ. 

Zeus, it does no good that you were my wife’s lover, no good that I have called you sharer in my son’s begetting. You were, it now appears, not as near a friend as I thought. In goodness I, though mortal, surpass you, a mighty god. I have not abandoned the children of Heracles. But you, though you know well enough how to slip secretly into bed and take other men’s wives when no one has given you permission, do not know how to save the lives of your nearest and dearest. Either you are a fool of a god or there is no justice in your nature. [Kovacs]

Eur. *HF* 1255-65 (Heracles)

Ηρ. Ἀκούε δὴ νῦν, ὡς ἀμιλληθῶ λόγοις 

πρὸς νουθετήσεις σάς ἀναπτύξω δὲ σοι 

ἀβίωτον ἤμιν νῦν τε καὶ πάροιθεν δν. 

πρῶτον μὲν ἐκ τουδ’ ἐγενόμην, ὡς κτανὼν 

μητρὸς γεραιὸν πατέρα προστρόπαιος ὡν 

ἐγημε τὴν τεκοῦσαν Ἀλκμήνην ἐμέ. 

ὅταν δὲ κρηπὶς μὴ καταβληθῆι γένους 

ὀρθῶς, ἀνάγκη δυστυχεῖν τοὺς ἐκγόνους. 

Ζεὺς δ’, ὡς Ζεύς, πολέμιον μ’ ἐγείνατο 

‘Ἡραι (σὺ μὲντοι μηδὲν ἀχθεσθῆς, γέρον· 

πατέρα γὰρ ἀντὶ Ζηνὸς ἡγοῦμαι σ’ ἐγώ)....

Listen so that I may reply to your admonitions. I shall demonstrate to you that my life, both now and of old, is not worth living. First my origins: my father had killed the old father of my mother Alcmene, and was guilty of bloodshed at the time he married her. When the foundation of a family is not laid straight, the descendants are fated to suffer ill fortune. Then Zeus—whenever Zeus is—begot me as an object of Hera’s hatred (no, old sir, do not take offense: I regard you, not Zeus as my father)... [Kovacs]
...but I do not think, have never believed, and will never be convinced that the gods have illicit love affairs or bind each other with chains or that one is master of another. A god, if he is truly a god, needs nothing. These are the wretched tales of the poets. [Kovacs]

4. From the Lost Plays of Euripides

Eur., Bellerophon, fr. 286N2

Bellerophon’s attack on divine justice, early in the play:

φησίν τις εἶναι δῆτ᾽ ἐν οὐρανῷ θεοὺς;  οὐκ εἰσίν, οὐκ εἴσ’, εἴ τις ἀνθρώπων θέλει  
μὴ τῷ παλαιῷ μῶρος ῥον γρήθας λόγω.  
σκέψασθε δ’ αὐτοὶ, μὴ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖς λόγοις  
γνώμην ἔχοντες, φήμ’ ἐγὼ τυραννίδα  
κτείνειν τε πλείστους κῃμάτων τ’ ἀποστερεῖν  
ὀρκοὺς τε παραβαίνοντας ἐκπορθεῖν πόλεις;  
καὶ τάτα δρῶντες μᾶλλον εἰσ’ εὐδαίμονες  
τῶν εὐσεβῶντων ἡσυχῇ καθ’ ἡμέραν.  
πόλεις τε μικρὰς οἶδα τιμώσας θεούς,  
αἳ μειζόνων κλύουσι δυσσεβεστέρων  
λόγχης ἄριθμῷ πλείονος κρατοῦμεναι.  
οἶμαι δ’ ἐν ὑμᾶς, εἴ τις ἄριστος ῥον θεοῖς  
ἐνχοῖτο καὶ μὴ χειρὶ συλλέγοι βίον,  
>  
τά θεία πυργοῦσίν αἱ κακαὶ τε συμφοραί.

Does someone say there are indeed gods in heaven? There are not, there are not, if a man is willing not to rely foolishly on the antiquated reasoning. Consider for yourselves, do not base your opinion on words of mine. I say myself that tyranny kills very many men and deprives them of their possessions; and that tyrants break their oaths to ransack cities, and in doing this they are more prosperous under heaven than men who live quietly in reverence from day to day. I know too of small cities doing honor to the gods which are subject to larger, more impious ones, because they are overcome by a more numerous army. I think that, if a man were lazy and prayed to the gods and did not go gathering his livelihood with his hand, you would < . . . fortify religion, and ill-fortune . . . [Collard]

5. Footnote

In class we read Trojan Women 884-888 and suggested there was nothing dangerously sophistic in Hecuba’s address to a world-governing Zeus “whether you are the necessity of nature or the mind of mortals.” But an ancient commentator claims these lines “derive from the sayings of Anaxagoras” (ὁρμῶνται δὲ ἐκ τῶν Ἀναξαγορείων λόγων).