Poetry & the Cosmos
Reading Questions #2
Very Short Introduction, Chapters 4-5

1. How do you understand the concluding statement of Xenophanes, fragment 34 (page 66, Box 13): “but belief extends across all”? How consistent is the idea with Parmenides? What statement of Parmenides (quoted in chapter 2) do you consider most relevant to compare?

2. Compare the use of relativism the arguments of Xenophanes and Melissus. Does it appear to you that Parmenides’ poem (composed between these two thinkers) is felt by Melissus? How?

3. Heraclitus is interesting to study in fragments. On the one hand, his style loves concise riddling utterances, so it is tempting to think that (like, say, some of Nietzsche’s books of aphorisms), even if we had his whole book, we would still have the experience of reading so many twisted one-liners. But since we’ve lost most of Heraclitus’ book, we owe him the benefit of the doubt. Reread the beginning of Heraclitus’ book (p. 92) with this in mind.

What methods or principles announced here, if Heraclitus really followed through on them, can you imagine providing a larger context of argument, in which the subject matter of the other fragments you’ve read would be relevant, but might have had a different point than what comes across reading them out of context?

4. [One-word answer is fine on this one!] Which philosopher is the most interesting to you so far?