

## EMPEDOCLES' THEOLOGY

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**Summary:** According to Empedocles, the universe is an evolving system made out of four elements molded by love and strife. In this universe, love and strife have no moral connotations. They are cosmic forces. Love is a force that aims at uniting elements, strife at separating them. The interplay between love and strife is kept in check by harmony. The particular way harmony manifests itself in the world is a law of proportions. The laws of harmony do not exist by themselves; they find their seat in the divine Mind, the divine *Phren*, and as such they are an attribute of God. Empedocles' God evolves over time. He is a mutable God who evolves from the *Phren* that permeates the entire sphere, to the *Phren* that recedes to the outermost sphere of the universe to control it from afar. God the holy *Phren* is most happy when indwelling the sphere. All other stages of world history are, from God's perspective, a necessary evil. God is not concerned about our world. Empedocles' God is not the God of love; he uses love to attain his goal. This world is just a stepping stone for achieving the stage of the sphere.

### 1

According to Empedocles, the universe is an evolving system made out of four eternal and imperishable roots or elements - air, fire, water, and earth - that are molded by two conflicting and equally eternal and undying forces, love and strife. The evolution is a recurrent development from the phase of total dominion of strife, resulting in total separation of the elements, to the total dominion of love, resulting in a perfect mixture of the elements in the cosmic sphere, and then back to the total dominion of strife. The intermediate phases in the evolving universe are the result of the interplay between love and strife. When the universe evolves from the one to the many, the world as we know it results, but this world has a tendency to disintegrate. Organisms that are at first

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well-fitted together from separate parts are broken into separate parts that may unite into monstrous combinations. But eventually, because of the weakness of the force of love, the parts cannot be combined into anything and are themselves broken down to the level of the four elemental components. On the other hand, when the universe evolves from the many to the one, at first, separate parts are composed under the guidance of love and then these parts are put together into disharmonious wholes. These monstrous combinations are not lasting, and then harmonious organisms emerge from, this time, well-organized combinations of parts. However, when love gains in strength, these organisms are destroyed so that the elemental materials constituting them can be homogeneously mixed together to form the sphere<sup>1</sup>.

In this universe, love and strife have no moral connotations. They are cosmic forces. Love is a force that aims at uniting elements, strife at separating them. However, love is just as destructive as strife, which was already observed by Aristotle who said that "in collecting things into the one it [love] destroys all other things" (*Met.* 1000b11-12). The result of the activity of love is a perfect union of the elements in the homogeneous sphere. This state is possible when love completely prevails, leaving strife on the outside of the sphere. At the opposite end of the world evolution, strife prevails, forcing love to the outside of the sphere. In that phase, the four elements are separated from each other into concentric spheres with heavy elements at the center and the light elements above them. Total rule of love has, thus, very unlovable consequences for the world as we know it; the world is destroyed and mixed thoroughly so that all that is in this world turns into the elements. It is true, then, that in the Empedoclean world "without strife, we would perish because of too much love"<sup>2</sup>.

It is interesting that, from the perspective of today's physics, the universe under the total reign of strife is more ordered than under the dominion of love because the entropy - and thus disorder - is greater in the latter than in the former. Nevertheless, some researchers came to the view that the world of strife is total

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<sup>1</sup> The traditional view of the cosmic cycle is reaffirmed in recently published new Empedoclean fragments, Alain Martin, Oliver Primavesi, *L'Empédocle de Strasbourg*, Berlin: de Gruyter 1999, p. 179, 219-220. The view of the evolutionary sequence in the world of increasing strife repeated in the reverse order in the world of increasing love is found in Edwin L. Minar, *Cosmic periods in the philosophy of Empedocles*, *Phronesis* 8 (1963), p. 140-145 and Denis O'Brien, *Empedocles' cosmic cycle*, Cambridge: The University Press 1969, p. 199. O'Brien, however, assumes that in the latter world people are eventually "assumed into the blissful Sphere," p. 3. It seems that only the material substrate into which people are dissolved is assumed there.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Bollack, *Empédocle*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit 1965, v. 3, p. 128.

chaos<sup>3</sup>. But Empedocles would use different criteria. To him it was obvious that keeping fire and water separate is easy and natural, but keeping them mixed so that water does not extinguish fire is so challenging that it requires a special force, love, to enable such a mixture.

## 2

The interplay between love and strife is kept in check by harmony. Harmonia is a daughter of Ares and Aphrodite (*Th.* 937, 975; *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 195), that is, a daughter of the god of war, or strife, and the goddess of love. In Empedocles' system, harmony should not be identified with love, as very often assumed<sup>4</sup>, nor is harmony simply a progeny or product of love<sup>5</sup> or of strife; harmony is an intermediary that reconciles the claims, so to speak, of love and strife. Thanks to harmony, the world can develop in an orderly manner, life can emerge, organisms can be formed. Harmony uses both strife and love to mold the world. It harnesses the power of the two conflicting forces to bring harmonious entities into existence. It can do, however, only that much. If love becomes too strong, or, for that matter, strife overpowers the force of love, harmony cannot operate as efficiently - and harmoniously - as in the stages of world development when the two forces are more or less equal. But whatever the stage is, harmony looks for the best arrangement of the elemental materials through the forces of love and strife to arrange the things of the world, to form the cosmos. The law of harmony assures that the incessant movement of the world from the prevalence of love to the prevalence of strife and then back to the complete rule of love is regular. There is no stage in which love rules only half way and then its power is

<sup>3</sup> "Incoherent chaos," Léon Robin, *La pensée grecque et les origines de l'esprit scientifique*, Paris: Renaissance du Livre 1923, p. 127 and N.I. Boussoulas, *Essai sur la structure du Mélange dans la pensée présocratique. Empédocle, Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 63 (1958), p. 140-141; "chaotic magma," Abel Rey, *La maturité de la pensée scientifique en Grèce*, Paris: Michel 1939, p. 106, 108.

<sup>4</sup> Such an identification has been made at least since Plutarch, *De Is. et Os.* 370d = B18 and Simplicius' comment on B96.4 and followed by M.R. Wright, *Empedocles: the extant fragments*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1981, p. 188, 210; O'Brien, *op. cit.*, p. 336, note 1; Bollack, *op. cit.*, v. 3, p. 134-135, 388. It is also made by Eduard Baltzer, *Empedocles. Eine Studie zur Philosophie der Griechen*, Leipzig: Eigendorf 1879, p. 98, 100; Minar, *op. cit.*, p. 131-132; Charles H. Kahn, *Religion and natural philosophy in Empedocles' doctrine of the soul, Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 42 (1960), p. 22, 24; Johann Ch. Lüth, *Die Struktur des Wirklichen im empedokleischen System "Über die Natur"*, Meisenheim: Hain 1970, p. 32, 34, 91.

<sup>5</sup> As assumed by Nicolaus van der Ben, *The proem of Empedocles' Peri physios*, Amsterdam: Grüner 1975, p. 160-161.

suppressed by the power of strife. This is a cyclical movement, ordered, and regular through the coordination of the exchange of power between love and strife under the rule of the law of harmony.

In his insistence on the presence of harmony, Empedocles is a Pythagorean. This is best seen in the particular way harmony manifests itself in the world, namely as a law of proportions.

In B96, Empedocles determines the makeup of bones; a bone is made out of four parts of fire (Hephaistos), two parts of earth, and two parts of gleaming Nestis, the latter two parts being two parts of water (Aetius 5.22.1 = A78), or one part air and one part water, because he calls both air and water gleaming and Nestis, according to Simplicius (*In De anima* 68.2-14 = B96). Whether the proportion is 4 fire : 2 earth : 2 water or 4 fire : 2 earth : 1 air : 1 water, this fragment indicates that for Empedocles, the nature of different materials encountered in the world was determined by the proportion of the four constitutive elements, in which the proportion was based on the number eight<sup>6</sup>. That is, the numbers in the proportion expressing the contribution of the four elements in a particular material - fire : earth : air : water - add up to eight: fire + earth + air + water = 8, and the numbers in the proportion can only be integers between 0 and 8<sup>7</sup>. For example, possible proportions are 1 : 2 : 3 : 2, 0 : 4 : 4 : 0, 3 : 1 : 3 : 1, etc. Empedocles himself gives another example, blood, which is composed of the four elements in almost exact proportion 1 : 1 : 1 : 1, or rather, 2 : 2 : 2 : 2 (Simplicius, *In Phys.* 32.6-10 = B98) - the same proportion of the four elements that are "all equal" (Simplicius, *In Phys.* 158.26 = B17.27) and "mixed in the sphere which is found most perfectly in the blood"<sup>8</sup>. For this reason blood is the organ of thinking (Theophrastus, *De sensu* 10 = A86).

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<sup>6</sup> "The eighths are established here [in B96] as the basis (*Exponent*) of relation," Bernhard H. C. Lommatzsch, *Die Weisheit des Empedocles*, Berlin: Reimer 1830, p. 189. The use of the number eight is clearly a Pythagorean element of Empedocles' philosophy. Pythagoras, by means of a single vibrating string called a monochord, discovered the ratios of frequencies that make up the musical scale since the harmonious octave reached over eight notes. Also, for the Pythagoreans generally (Proclus, *In Tim.* 2.270.5) and for Philolaus in particular (*Theologumena arithmeticae* 74.10 = 44A12), eight signifies love, friendship, wisdom, and thought, and to Pythagoras is attributed the view that friendship is harmony (DL 8.33 = 58B1a). For Empedocles, then, the harmony of the cosmos is reflected in the number eight used in determining proportions of constitutive elements in the things of nature.

<sup>7</sup> "There is no reason to suppose that all four [elements] are constituents of everything," Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>8</sup> Bollack, *op. cit.*, v. 3, p. 382.

Although there are in total 165 such possible combinations of proportions based on the number eight, this does not mean that there are only 165 different possible materials, four of them being elemental, the rest being compound. Not only bones, but also flesh is approximately in proportion of 1 : 1 : 1 : 1 (Aetius 5.22.1 = A78)<sup>9</sup>. Also, sinew is “fire and earth with double amount of water” - that is, 2 fire : 2 earth : 4 water - and “claws are produced from sinews which are cooled off as they meet the air” (Aetius 5.22.1 = A78). That is, claws are cooled off sinews. Cooling off may be the cause of better - or worse - mixture so that the blending of the three elements of claws is different than in sinews. This may mean that the elements constituting, say, bones are there in correct proportions - otherwise bones would not be bones - but they are not mixed properly; that is, they are partially separated from one another. The distinctiveness of different materials is thus determined by both the particular proportion of elements and the extent to which the elements are mixed in the material. For this reason, Theophrastus can say that to Empedocles a particular skill is due to a moderate blend in an organ. Some are good speakers because they have such a blend in their tongue, some are good craftsmen because such a blend is in their hands. “Those in whom [the elements] are mixed equally ... are most thoughtful and most accurate in their sense-perceptions” (Theophrastus, *De sensu* 11 = A86).

How is a particular mixture determined? Empedocles says that proportional parts of bone are “marvelously held together by the gluing of harmony” (B96.5). The acceptable ratios of elements that determine the makeup of what exists in the world are the laws of harmony, the harmony itself<sup>10</sup>. Harmony cannot be derived from the four elements; it cannot be derived from the two primeval forces<sup>11</sup>. Harmony is the component that, in a manner of speaking, glues these elements, the component that embodies what is best, durable, acceptable, desirable. Harmony uses to that end both love and strife. It is natural

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<sup>9</sup> Aetius says, “in exact proportion,” which is probably too strongly phrased and it should be taken to mean, “in almost exact proportion,” cf. Harald A.T. Reiche, *Empedocles' mixture, Eudoxan astronomy and Aristotle's connate pneuma*, Amsterdam: Hakkert 1960, p. 54, note 1.

<sup>10</sup> This justifies the definition of harmony as “the formula of the compound,” Gordon H. Clark, *Empedocles and Anaxagoras in Aristotle's De anima*, Philadelphia 1929, p. 19, or better yet, as a set of all formulas of all compounds.

<sup>11</sup> Jaeger is correct in stating that harmony “has the individual gods of the four elements and the gods of Love and Hate firmly in her control,” Werner Jaeger, *The theology of the early Greek philosophers*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1947, p. 236, note 52. Aphrodite does not invent the proportion, as claimed by Bollack, *op. cit.*, v. 1, p. 79, but she obeys it.

that love is glue because it unites different elements into one entity<sup>12</sup>, but strife also can be used as glue by “forming particular bodies by attracting the similar to the similar”<sup>13</sup>.

The laws of harmony are thus divine laws. They are divine because they are eternal, because they are the laws to which love and strife are subsumed, and because they express the rationality of the world. However, they do not exist by themselves; they find their seat in the divine Mind, the divine *Phren*, and as such they are an attribute of God<sup>14</sup>.

### 3

The fact of existence of the laws of harmony is insufficient to insure that the laws can take effect. Harmony pertains to what is best and desirable, but what is best and desirable can only remain an idea that is never or is only incidentally realized. If the events in the universe occur by chance only, then there is little chance that a harmonious whole can emerge, much less periodically, regularly, like in a clockwork.

Empedocles refers to randomly occurring events. This is particularly stressed by Simplicius who says that Empedocles “had some notion of things which happen by chance” and quotes seven brief fragments that use one of the three randomness words: συγκυρεῖν, τυγχάνειν, and τύχη (B53, B59.2, B98.1, B85, B75.2, B103, B104, in that order, *In Phys.* 330.31-331.176). In particular, Empedocles states that in the creation of the cosmos, air “chanced to be running in this way, but often otherwise” (B53); that is, sometimes upward, as it should, but sometimes downward, when “it sank with long roots into the earth” (Aristotle, *De gen. et corr.* 334a5 = B54). This was the result of the activity of the two conflicting forces, love and strife. This apparent disorder continues even after the cosmos is formed - “after the earth and sea appeared” as phrased by Tzetzes (*Exeg. in Iliad.* 42.17-26 = A66) - and a perfect order can only be if one of the forces prevails. In the meantime, that is, most of the time in the history of the universe, the conflict of the two forces makes an appearance of randomness, at least in the short term. “After the earth and sea appeared,” they did not disintegrate immediately due to the random movements of elements, but the glue

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<sup>12</sup> “Love, like glue, can make the elements stick together, and it is in this sense that it is the harmony,” says Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> Yves Battistini, *Trois présocratiques: Héraclite, Parménide, Empédocle*, Paris: Gallimard 1988, p. 118.

<sup>14</sup> As phrased by Giorgio de Santillana, the *Phren* that is “some sort of archetypal intellect ... is the fount from which Love draws the ratios and harmonies for its operations,” *The origins of scientific thought*, New York: Mentor Book 1961, p. 121.

of harmony kept them together. In this, harmony works as a filter that retains these configurations of elements that are generated by the conflict of love and strife. These two forces are concerned primarily about getting an upper hand over each other. The things in the world that emerge as a result of the struggle of these two forces are just a side effect that becomes permanent over longer periods of time due to the activity of the selective nature of the laws of harmony, that is, due to the activity of God. This can best be seen in one fragment quoted by Simplicius: “by the will of chance all things have thought” (B103). The apparently random result of world evolution is that *all* things are endowed with a measure of rationality (and the ability to feel pleasure and pain, as stated in Theophrastus, *De sensu* 10 = B107). If randomness were the only principle of constructing things, then about a half of them should be devoid of any rational faculty if the glue of harmony is not used to make such an arrangement permanent (or semi-permanent). The will of chance would endow things with thought but it also would empty them of it, should they have any. The overseeing laws of harmony make it certain that the created arrangement is not randomly dissolved, but kept as long as the interplay of the two equally strong forces allows them to exist. This type of explanation is, in fact, offered by Simplicius himself. He says that different parts of animals came together to form an animal, but only those combinations of parts survived that “supplied each others’ needs” and “as many as did not come together in their proper proportion (*logos*) perished” (*In Phys.* 371.33-372.8 = B61).

Empedocles also writes about necessity and its impact on the course of peregrinations in the world of defiled *daimones*: “There is an oracle of necessity, an ancient decree of the gods, eternal, sealed with broad oaths” which determines how the *daimones* would wander (Hippolytus, *Ref.* 7.29.23 = B115.1-2). This oracle is not limited to the determination of the ways of the *daimones*. Empedocles also says that “when strife has grown great in his [god’s] limbs and has sprung up to claim its rights as the dawning was being completed which has been defined for each in turn by a broad oath [then ...]” (Simplicius, *In Phys.* 1184.14-16 = B30). The dominion of love is not interminable. There comes a time when love has to relinquish its power to strife which, in due time, will do the same for love. The interchangeability of these dominions is not done willingly by either of the two forces, but is accomplished under the supervision of necessity because necessity is, in the words of Hippolytus, “the change from one to many by strife and from many to one by love” (B115). The oracle of necessity is immutable, and this oracle determines a general course of events. The details may be open to determination by the behavior of love and strife in a particular part of the universe, which makes the appearance of randomly occurring events, but the

general trend is prescribed. That is why the world develops cyclically, as also later for the Stoics, and that is why, unlike for at least some Stoics, all cycles are not identical. Understandably, Hippolytus considers it to be “the greatest law for the ordering of all things” (*Ref.* 7.29.23 = B115).

The world from eternity is made and remade out of the four primal elements due to the action of the two forces. The world and everything in it has some measure of reason and as such is able to set goals. These goals would be irreconcilable if there were no unifying instance. This unifying instance is God the *Phren*, the seat of rationality of the universe. This rationality manifests itself in the law of harmony and in necessity. The *Phren*'s ideal is to be embedded in the sphere forever. This would, however, mean that strife should be forever suppressed if not annihilated. But Empedocles' world is not unlike a Manichean world: there are two equally powerful forces and one is unwilling to relinquish permanently its power to the opposite force. To avoid a chaotic situation, allowing each power to prevail in its turn is the second best solution. In this way, the two powers may be satisfied with their claims to be a dominating power<sup>15</sup>. The law of necessity reconciles these claims and allows for the law of harmony to take effect. The world can be harmonious because there is a necessary trend in the way the world evolves. In this sense, necessity is the highest law<sup>16</sup>. As such a law, it was also called by Empedocles fate ( $\alpha\lambda\iota\sigma\alpha$ )<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> “If the cosmic cycle is to continue in endless succession ... and yet is to be dominated by two opposed forces, Love and Strife, there must be an equilibrium inherent in the structure of the cycle. This equilibrium is most obviously expressed in equal periods of rule of the two powers. This equality in its turn is in the fifth century naturally expressed in terms of necessity,” O’Brien, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

<sup>16</sup> It is stated that “Empedocles lets in the necessity all natural principles to be united in one [principle] only,” Lommatzsch, *op. cit.*, p. 70 (“necessity is the law according to which being is as it is, rules and forms as it happens, so again deforms and loosens, as it takes place, thus only this, which is so necessary, as it is, is absolute,” p. 67) and overstated that “Empedocles seems to believe in an ineluctable, eternal decree of Fate or Necessity, in a supreme Law that is above the elements, above the forces, above the gods,” Helle Lambridis, *Empedocles*, University, Ala.: The University of Alabama Press 1976, p. 52.

<sup>17</sup> The four roots “in turn prevail as the cycle rolls and decrease into each other and increase in succession of fate” (Simplicius, *In Phys.* 33.19-20 = B26.1-2); this fate is “the universal law of being,” in the words of William E. Leonard, notes in Empedocles, *The fragments*, Chicago: The Open Court 1908, p. 74.



## 4

God is, in Empedocles' words, an "all alone, holy and ineffable Mind (φρήν), by his swift thoughts rushing through the entire universe"<sup>18</sup>. A *phren* is the rational faculty which requires a substrate to exist. Empedocles did not envision a *phren*, even the holy *Phren*, God, as an immaterial, standalone being<sup>19</sup>. But although requiring a material substrate, the *Phren* should not be identified with it. As such, the *Phren* cannot be grasped through unaided perception: "It is impossible to come near [the divine], within reach of our eyes, or to grasp him with the hands, although this is the main road of persuasion entering the minds of men" (Clement, *Strom.* 5.81.2 = B133). The divine cannot be grasped through senses but through reasoning, through the operation of the human *phren*<sup>20</sup>. This, by the way, indicates that although he did not offer any epistemological theory in the extant fragments, Empedocles did not quite identify perception and thinking as claimed by Aristotle<sup>21</sup>.

A substrate has an impact on the way the *Phren* works: the more elements that participate in the mixture and the better mixed they are, the better are the workings of the *Phren*. Because the ideal mixture can only be found in the sphere, the sphere is called God (Simplicius, *In Phys.* 1184.2-4 = B31), even the most happy God (Aristotle, *Met.* 1000b3-4). The sphere is also called so because it is full of the *Phren*; God completely fills the sphere; the *Phren* is present in each part of the sphere. However, by itself, the sphere is not divine<sup>22</sup>. It is only the perfect material setting for the *Phren*. The sphere is divine because it is the best setting for the *Phren*, not because it is the perfect mixture. Only in this state can God, the holy *Phren*, be the most happy. Only in this state is God-*Phren* in

<sup>18</sup> Ammonius, *In De interp.* 249.9-10 = B134; the fragment is "an acknowledgment of an almost monotheistic concept of God," Hermann Diels, *Über die Gedichte des Empedokles, Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 62 (1898), p. 405.

<sup>19</sup> Although Olympiodorus, *In Gorg.* 4.3, gives B134.1 as Empedocles' anticipation of Plato's denial that God is *σωματικός*, Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

<sup>20</sup> And only in this sense we may agree that God can be grasped in a supersensory manner, as stated by Lommatzsch, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>21</sup> *De anima* 427a22-23 = B106. Aristotle quotes B106 and B108 as a proof, but these quotations seem to be remarkably unrelated to the problem of cognition. In this fragment, Aristotle is clearly misleading, as bluntly stated by Clara E. Millerd, *On the interpretation of Empedocles*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1908 [reprint, New York: Garland 1980], p. 81. In B17.21, Empedocles requires that one should look and love with the mind (*nous*) not with the eyes.

<sup>22</sup> Inwood also argues for the nonidentification of God and the sphere, Brad Inwood, *The poem of Empedocles*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2001, p. 68.

the blissful solitude (Stobaeus 1.15.2 = B28). Also, it is the state in which God can be said to be “held fast in the close covering of harmony, a rounded sphere rejoicing in joyous stillness” (Simplicius, *In Phys.* 1183.32-1184.1 = B27.3-4). This is because harmony prevails completely when, in particular, all the four elements are perfectly mixed in the entire world so that the proportion 1 : 1 : 1 : 1 is present in the tiniest portion of the universe. Due to the harmonious constitution of the universe, God is the happiest God, God can truly enjoy this solitude. The laws of harmony truly prevail, and God is immersed in the result of the working of these laws, the sphere<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, because it primarily leads to the emergence of the sphere, love is a positive force - positive from God’s perspective.

The sphere phase is but one phase of the evolution of the universe. The sphere loses its homogeneity, and the elements become more and more separate. What becomes of the *Phren* then? The universe becomes ruled more and more by strife, and the *Phren* becomes weaker and weaker. But it never ceases to exist. Because the *Phren*’s thoughts dart through the universe (as effluences, similarly to the mechanism of perception as reported by Theophrastus), the *Phren* does not lose a grip on the universe. By so darting through the world, the *Phren* steers it and has it under its control and remains the measure of what is harmonious and thus fitting to exist.

However, at the stage when the strife rules completely, the *Phren*’s immediate presence is more limited. The universe is now a hostile environment, but the *Phren* still exists and is distributed over the universe because “all things have intelligence (*phronesis*) and share of thought (*noema*)” (B110.10)<sup>24</sup>. Although God is not limited to it, he appears to be the strongest in the outermost sphere, the sphere of fire. Empedocles singled out fire when he “taught that [all] parts of fire, <the visible and> the invisible, have intelligence and equal knowledge (φρόνησιον ἔχειν καὶ γνώμην ἴσην)”<sup>25</sup>. The fiery part of the universe

<sup>23</sup> “The more God is immersed in his own harmony, the more he is anchored, more immobile,” Bollack, *op. cit.*, v. 3, p. 136.

<sup>24</sup> Reiche, *op. cit.*, p. 13, suggests that “all things” should refer only to “organic mixtures of all types,” because according to Sextus’ comment (8.286), Empedocles taught that “all things - and not only animals but also plants - are rational” when he wrote B110.10. But if so, then there would not be any intelligence in the world devoid of life - the world of total victory of strife - and thus God would cease to exist altogether, which can hardly be fitted into Empedocles’ system.

<sup>25</sup> Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.12.1 = B110. Hippolytus’ statement that for Empedocles “God is the intelligent fire” (*Ref.* 1.3.1 = A31) sounds very much like a pronouncement from the system of Heraclitus or the Stoics, particularly considering the allusion to the world

at the state of separation would be most divine because the *Phren* would there be the strongest. In this sense, it would be true that God encompasses the world<sup>26</sup>.

The fact that the *Phren* is strongest at the outside region of the universe during strife's reign is confirmed by the status of aether in Empedocles' system. Two sources seem to distinguish air and fire from aether when describing the order in which elements are separated from the sphere: "aether was separated off first, then fire, then earth," and then water is separated off from earth and air from water, reports Aetius (2.6.3 = A49). "After aether is separated, air and fire revolved upwards and formed heavens and revolved in wide orbit," says Philo (*De prov.* 2.60-61 = A49). These testimonies may suggest that there are not four, but five elements, but it seems more possible to view aether as a mixture of fire and air: fiery air<sup>27</sup> (Aetius mentions a fiery element contained in air that is used as material to form stars, 2.13.2 = A53). It must be important for Empedocles to introduce this compound element, aether. This importance should not only stem from using a term that others use. It appears that aether maintains its integrity even at the stage of strife's prevalence<sup>28</sup>. Because it separates first, it occupies the

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conflagration (all things "will be dissolved into fire"), but it could be harmonized with Empedocles' views on God and in particular with the just quoted Hippolytus' ascription to Empedocles of the view on intelligibility of fire. O'Brien says that the first chapter of *Refutatio* shows "a profound ignorance of the doctrine of Empedocles" and in later chapter, Hippolytus has documentation of "exceptional quality," Denis O'Brien, *Pour interpreter Empédocle*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres 1981, p. 20, note 1. It would appear that even the first chapter is not without value.

<sup>26</sup> This view is espoused by Shirley M. Darcus, Daimon parallels the Holy Phren in Empedocles, *Phronesis* 22 (1977), p. 177, who, however, seems to separate God from the elements altogether when she says that all the four elements "are held within the Divine *Phren*," p. 185. What then is the physical makeup of the *Phren*? It would seem that God is completely different from the elements. God cannot be reduced to love and strife, either, which, according to Darcus, are God's only two thoughts that dart through the universe. There may be only one support to this view found in Aetius that for Empedocles the universe is the cosmos and inert matter (1.5.2 = A47). Could this inert matter be the holy *Phren*?

<sup>27</sup> O'Brien, *Empedocles' cosmic cycle*, p. 290-292; Inwood, *op. cit.*, p. 106, note 36. See Peter Kingsley, *Ancient philosophy, mystery, and magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean tradition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995, p. 15-35, 40, for an argument that aether is heaven and the outer boundary of the universe and also air around us and *aer* is misty air.

<sup>28</sup> It is by no means obvious that aether must eventually be separated into fire and air, as suggested by O'Brien, *Empedocles' cosmic cycle*, p. 290.

outermost position in the world of concentric circles of separated elements<sup>29</sup>. If we assume that love is at this stage on the outermost limits of the universe - on "the furthest limits of the circle"<sup>30</sup> - then love would assure the integrity of aether in this region of the world. And because aether is a mixture, this would be a region in which the *Phren* is the strongest.

This all indicates that Empedocles' God evolves over time. He is a mutable God who evolves from the *Phren* that permeates the entire sphere, to the *Phren* that recedes to the outermost sphere of the universe to control it from afar. However, the *Phren* remains the *Phren* throughout all these vicissitudes, always immanent in the world.

The divine *Phren* is not the only *phren* that exists. Man also has *phren* which requires attention and should be cherished and cared for. This is done through learning, through which *phren* can grow. Empedocles assures Pausanias: "learning will expand your *phren*" (B17.14). One must watch that deception does not overcome one's *phren* (Simplicius, *In Phys.* 160.9 = B23.9) and only man "wise in his *phren*" can protect himself from falsehood (Plutarch, *Adv. Col.* 1113d = B15.1). This is not always an easy task because people are defensive about new and unexpected truths, such as the ones pronounced by Empedocles, and "the onrush of conviction (πίστις) on the *phren* is difficult for them and is resented" (Clement, *Strom.* 5.9.1 = B114).

The *Phren* that is an embodiment of the rationality of the world has also a moral dimension. The ideal setting for the *Phren* is the sphere because all the four elements are equally and perfectly mixed in it. The closest approximation to this ultimate mixture is the blood and the flesh. Blood and flesh are miniature approximations of the makeup of the sphere and, not surprisingly, man's rationality is directly associated with the blood: "for men, thought (νόημα) is blood around the heart"<sup>31</sup>. Because blood is closest to the sphere in respect to its material composition and structure, it can host man's rational dimension that is a

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<sup>29</sup> It seems to be too generous to suggest that on "the extreme circumference there is a band of elements in the state of perfect mixture," all four elements, that is, Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

<sup>30</sup> Simplicius, *In Phys.* 32.20 = B35.10. From this position, love later "gets into the middle of the whirl," (B35.4); cf. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 74, 207. Arguments are made that love is in the center of separated elements, O'Brien, *Empedocles' cosmic cycle*, p. 105, Bollack, *op. cit.*, v. 3, p. 197.

<sup>31</sup> Porphyry, *ap. Stobaeus* 1.49.53 = B105. The words *phren*, *phronesis* (that have the same root), and *noema* are approximately synonymous in Empedocles, cf. Walter Veazie, *Empedocles' psychological doctrine in its original and in its traditional setting*, New York: Columbia University Press 1922, p. 4.

reflection, albeit imperfect, of the divine *Phren*. This has very practical consequences that Empedocles describes in the *Purifications*. Who destroys an almost divine setting for an almost divine *phren* commits a crime not only on another human or animal, but also on the *Phren*. An inescapable consequence is a swift punishment, a punishment that is allotted in accordance to a divine law, “a law for all [which] extends through the broad air and through the boundless light”<sup>32</sup>. A crime against a man and - considering the fact of reincarnation (e.g., Hippolytus, *Ref.* 1.3.2 = B117, Aelian, *De nat. anim.* 12.7 = B127) - against an animal is a crime against the divine and a universal law of justice prohibits that very strictly. For this reason, “the cruel deed of eating flesh” (Porphyry, *De abst.* 2.31 = B139) is abominable and punishable and strict vegetarianism is prescribed. However, unconstrained vegetarianism is not an option, either. In the course of reincarnation, a man can become a bush (B117) and a plant, particularly a laurel tree (B127), so that it is explicitly said that people should “keep altogether from the leaves of the laurel” (Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 646d = B140). Also, beans are mentioned as plants which people should keep off their hands (Gellius 4.11.9 = B141). Since everything is endowed with a measure of intelligence and everything may become a hosting place for a human *daimon* after death, the dietary rules become a real challenge in the Empedoclean world.

According to Empedocles, “the greatest crime among men [is] to bereave of life and eat noble limbs” of animals - bulls in particular (Theophrastus, *ap.* Porphyry, *De abst.* 2.27 = B128.9-10). When a father sacrifices an animal, he really could be sacrificing his own son (Sextus 9.129 = B136 + B137). An apparently pious act of sacrificing an animal amounts to a murder. If religious sacrifices are a crime, all the more so for bloodletting in any situation. War is a crime against men and against God, and it should be avoided at all costs. Empedocles' vision is that by pure living - that includes vegetarianism, no animal sacrifices, and avoiding wars - men come as close as possible to the divine.<sup>33</sup> Was there any meaning in any sacrifices at all? Since all the deities of the traditional mythology are mortal gods who are shaped by human imagination, only sacrifices to immortal gods can be considered. There is no hint of making sacrifices to any

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<sup>32</sup> Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1373b16-17 = B135. As correctly indicated by van der Ben, *op. cit.*, p. 196, because air “extends from the firmament of heaven all the way down to earth and the light of the sun (ἀυγή) not only shines up to heaven but also down to earth,” the validity of the law is not confined to heaven only but to all who breathe the air and see the sunlight. This is truly a “grandiose statement of a universal law,” Günther Zuntz, *Persephone: three essays on religion and thought in Magna Graecia*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1971, p. 219.

<sup>33</sup> “An end of bloodshed would mean the restoration of mankind to divine status,” van der Ben, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

of the four elements. In only one fragment is there a mention of bloodless sacrifices made to Cypris, that is, Aphrodite, when “there was no Ares, nor Tumult, nor Zeus was the king, nor Cronus, nor Poseidon” (Theophrastus, *ap. Porphyry, De abst.* 2.21 = B128.1-3). This was the time when love began to recede and strife to increase its influence - the golden age, unlike the age described by Hesiod<sup>34</sup>. Whether Empedocles simply described one of the stages of human history or wanted to make recommendations for the way sacrifices should be made in his own age is uncertain<sup>35</sup>. People worshipped Aphrodite with bloodless sacrifices, but they did not realize that Aphrodite is really a mythical representation of the real physical force of love<sup>36</sup> whose increase and decrease is done under the direction of God through the law of harmony. Does it make sense to offer sacrifices to such a deity? Although general tendency of world evolution is prescribed by necessity, there is still plenty of room for variations in the way love and strife influence developments in particular parts of the universe. It is, thus, possible that sacrifices may make a difference in that respect for a certain period of time in a certain place. Therefore, it is more meaningful to make sacrifices to love than to God. The Empedoclean God does not elicit much of an attitude of worship. God the holy *Phren* is most happy when indwelling the sphere. All other stages of world history are, from God’s perspective, a necessary evil. God is not concerned about our world. Empedocles’ God is not the God of love<sup>37</sup>; he uses love to attain his goal. This world is just a stepping stone for achieving the stage of the sphere. If anyone in the world undermines the scope of the sphere, or rather the sphere-like tissues of blood and flesh, he is liable for punishment. On the other hand, if people were precipitating the reign of the sphere by pure living, abstention from blood, etc., this would mean that they precipitate their own annihilation and thus the happiness of God. There is no escape from destruction in this world, whether under the growing influence of love or strife. There is only an existence in this “joyless place” (Hierocles, *In Aurea carmina* 24.2 = B121, *cf. Clement, Strom.* 3.14.2 = B118).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Zuntz, *op. cit.*, p. 206-207.

<sup>35</sup> Zuntz, *op. cit.*, p. 259, suggests that Empedocles wanted “a reform of the cult of his day.”

<sup>36</sup> The fact that Cypris-Aphrodite in B128 represents love was already stressed in a parenthetical remark, ἡ ἐστὶν ἡ φιλία, of Theophrastus who quotes B128; see also Jacob Bernays, *Theophrastos’ Schrift Über Frömmigkeit*, Berlin: Hertz 1866 [reprint, Hildesheim: Olms 1979], 95; Walter Pötscher, commentaries to *Theophrastos, Περὶ εὐσεβείας*, Leiden: Brill 1964, 64-65.

<sup>37</sup> As suggested by Lommatzsch, *op. cit.*, p. 78, 87.

## 5

It has already been mentioned that Empedocles believes in reincarnation. This does not mean an immortal existence after death<sup>38</sup>. Empedocles refers to immortality, even his own immortality. He also mentions *daimones* as being "allotted long-lasting life" that are apparently different than the gods (B115.5)<sup>39</sup>.

It seems that for Empedocles the *daimon* is a fallen god that is united with a body, a human body at first, but in the process of reincarnation, it can be present in an animal or even a plant body. A god is a miniature God: a *phren* that can exist most comfortably and happily in a perfect mixture of the sphere. It is unclear whether such an individual *phren* can exist by itself in the sphere or is part of the holy *Phren* and then separated from it. True immortality would require that an individual *phren*-god retains its individuality even in the sphere, but it is possible to see such a singular *phren* as created anew from the *Phren* by strife at the beginning of the phase of increasing strife. In that case, a god would be just potentiality existing, as it were, within the womb of the *Phren*<sup>40</sup>. Such a potential-only existence of *phrenes* in the *Phren* is indicated by the fact that the *Phren* exists in solitude (B28) in the sphere. Within the confines of a human body, a god exists as a *phren* due to the existence of blood in the body. However, because of the imperfection of the mixture constituting blood and flesh of the body, human *phren* is weaker as would be the case in the sphere and leads man to unseemly deeds such as eating flesh whereby man, and thus the *phren*, become polluted. It requires special effort to retain purity, which can be accomplished only by a few: Clement remarks that according to Empedocles, "the souls of the wise become gods" (*Strom.* 4.150.1 = B146). To be sure, Empedocles includes himself among such ones and thus calls himself an immortal god: "An immortal god, mortal no more, I go about honored by all" (Diogenes 8.61 = B112.4-5). Man can improve himself (Porphyry, *Vita Pyth.* 30 = B129, B146, Clement, *Strom.* 5.140.5 = B132), and as a man he remains an ephemeral being, but, by improving himself, he purifies the *phren* within himself and can cease to be mortal by raising himself to the level of immortality. The edge of the hubristic statement that he is a god does not have to be dulled by saying that only others elevated him to that status<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> The point is forcefully argued by O'Brien, *Empedocles' cosmic cycle*, p. 85.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Darcus, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Inwood, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>41</sup> "I am honored among all as an immortal god" does not imply "I declare that I am a god." "The statement does not express Empedocles' own conviction but merely describes the attitude people assume towards him," van der Ben, *op. cit.*, p. 22. It is possible to see

He seems to have truly believed that such an elevation by one's own power is possible, and the doxographers who state that "he went from a city to a city wanting to pass for a god" (*Suda* = A2; Philostratus *Vita Ap.* 8.76 = A18) and that "in his desire to pass for an immortal god," Empedocles jumped into Etna (Strabo 6.2.8 = A16) are not far off from the spirit of Empedoclean vision of the afterlife.

An individual *phren* in an ideal setting of the sphere is a god, if only as the potentiality within the *Phren*. After dissipation of the sphere, the perfection of the *phren* diminishes and it becomes a *daimon* when it exists in an "alien garment" of the human body<sup>42</sup>. Purification rites purify the body and through the body also the *phren*. The *phren* can also be strengthened directly by mental development. Through these exercises the *daimon* can become a god again<sup>43</sup>. If not, the *phren* can be annihilated and thereby its individual, immortal existence. The borderline between morality and immortality can be crossed in both directions. The disappearance of the sphere makes it dangerously easy to lose immortality by careless living. But an individual effort can let mortals through the threshold of immortality. However, in the Empedoclean world, the holy *Phren* is of no help in this endeavor. It appears that the Empedoclean God is only a spectator of the human struggles in the world. This is bleak physics and unappealing theology that is of little spiritual comfort for those who would like to find in religion any consolation. By purifying traditional religion, from very often unpalatable anthropomorphism of the Olympian gods, Empedocles offers a system that is philosophically more elegant but spiritually just as unfulfilling as the world of the gods of old.

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the *daimon* is "a portion of deity" (cf. Kahn, *op. cit.*, p. 26) in a manner of the Stoics. In this case, a statement of being a god is supposedly an expression of humility rather than hubris, as maintained by Lommatzsch, *op. cit.*, p. 30-31.

<sup>42</sup> Porphyry, *ap.* Stobaeus 1.49.60 = B126. This may be what Zuntz meant in the phrase that the *daimon* is "a divine potency stripped, for an aeon, of his divine identity," *op. cit.*, p. 271.

<sup>43</sup> And only a few will succeed, Karl Kerényi, *Pythagoras und Orpheus*, Zürich: Rhein-Verlag 1950, p. 23.