The union of the cosmology and daimonology thus opens new schisms within Empedocles's autobiography and his philosophy. On the one hand, the narrative "I" whose emotional tale of transformation enacts the elemental theory is (literally) disintegrated by that theory: in this contradictory autobiography the *autos* is unwritten by the *bios* he writes, leaving the author (and thus authority) of that life story uncertain. On the other hand, if the pedagogical "I" depends on the daimonic autobiography to substantiate his physical theories, then he, too, is in jeopardy, as is the theory he teaches: the doctrine would be validated by the account of a life that the doctrine itself renders untellable. These contradictions trouble not only the narrative "I," both daimonological and cosmological, but also the authorial "I," the persona projected by the text that allows us to speak of "Empedocles's philosophy" at all.[40] For "Empedocles" as well as his narrators, "I"—as the stable and authoritative source of his philosophy and guarantor of its stability and authority—is at once impossible and, as we shall see, ineliminable.

Recognizing the interdependence of Empedocles's two (if they are two) poems and personae thus merely reproduces a fundamental schism in the position of philosophical enunciation, as the philosophical *autos* is shown to be both divided in itself and in tension with the doctrine it expounds. This schizophrenia is not the effect of a historical split between scientist and sorcerer awkwardly sutured into a mythical hybrid, nor can it be resolved by a reading that turns the daimonic *autos* into an allegorical philosopher or the natural philosopher into a god. Instead, I will suggest, it is the symptom of Empedocles's radical new theory of life and the fundamentally ambiguous place of the self within it.

BIOS

We have seen that Empedocles's autobiography destabilizes the *autos*: the idea of a singular autonomous self, knowing and writing his own life, is undermined by that life itself. In fact, Empedocles shifts the relations among these terms. In his fragments, autobiography is not the writing of the life of a self, the *bios* of an *autos*, but the writing of life itself, *bios ho autos*. And the protagonist of this story is not the singular self but instead a swarming multiplicity of lives, human and nonhuman, each with its own agency and desires.

For Empedocles, the story of an individual life is contained within and inseparable from the story of life as a whole. Most people, Empedocles writes, "see only a small share of life (*biou*) in their lifetimes (*zōēisi*), and swift-fated like smoke they rise and fly, believing only this, what each happens to encounter as they are driven everywhere, but he boasts that he has discovered the whole" (B2.3–6/D42.3–6).

Wright 1981, 276). The latter view would diminish, but not eliminate, the tension between the physical theory and the concept of an identity that persists across reincarnations.

40. Foucault 1984, 105–13. I return to the author function in the Conclusion.

The individual's *zōē*, singular and limited, is contrasted to *bios*, life as a whole. But each ephemeral existence opens onto that whole: the phrase "what each happens to encounter" will appear in another fragment in reference to the elements.[41] Each concrete individual life span, *zōē*, is fundamentally connected to *bios*, life as such.[42]

Bios, in turn, takes on an expanded meaning in light of Empedocles's cosmic theory. "A wise man would not divine such things in his mind, that as long as they live what they call their life (*biōsi to dē bioton kaleousi*), for so long do they exist (*eisin*) and experience bad things and good, but before mortals were formed and after they have dissolved, they are nothing" (B15/D52). Mortals use the word *bios* for their own brief biological life span: they do not realize that their being extends beyond their own birth and death. In truth, there is no birth and death for "mortal things" but only mixing and separation of elements, which we name *phusis* and *thanatos* (B8/D53, cf. B9/D54, B11/D51). This is true for human beings but also for every other being in Empedocles's cosmos, including the gods, who are "long-lived" but not immortal (B21.12/D77a.12, B23.8/D60.8, P. Strasb. a (ii) 2/D73.272). Only the four root elements and the two forces are eternal. Everything else is merely a temporary combination of roots as they merge and separate under the forces of Love and Strife.[43] *Bios* encompasses the entire cycle, as B20/D73.302–308 shows: both the coming together of limbs to form bodies "in the acme of flourishing life" (*biou thalethontos en akmēi*, B20.3/D73.304) under Love and their desolate wandering "each apart in the breakers of life" (*andikh' hekasta perirrēgmini bioio*, B20.5/D73.306) under Strife. The emotional tone of this fragment recalls the autobiographical account of *Purifications*'s *daimōn*. But what is presented there as the saga of a singular *egō*, this fragment shows to be shared with every other mortal creature: "And in the same way for bushes and water-dwelling fish and beasts who sleep in the mountains and doves on the wing" (B20.6–7/D73.307–308).

The life of the individual is thus an intrinsic part of the life of the cosmos, and the story of the *autos* is part of the story of *bios* as a whole. This is because

41. B59.2/D149.2; cf. B53/D105, B98.1/D190.1, B104/D107. Likewise in the first line of B2/D42 the "narrow devices (*palamai*) poured over the limbs" that constrain mortal understanding also link it to the *palamai* of Kupris (B75.2/D200.2) that fashion living things. If he "looks with every device (*palamē*)," as the speaker urges in B3.9/D44.9, the student will come to understand that "the whole" is nothing but myriad "shares of life." Similarly, *aiōn* is used of the life span of individuals (B110.3/D257.3, B129.6/D38.6, P. Strasb. a(ii) 6/D73.276), of the ever-changing existence of the roots (B17.11/D73.242, B26.10/D77b.10), and of the perpetual cycling of Love and Strife (B16/D63).

42. Thus Agamben's distinction, drawn from Aristotle, between *bios* (political life) and *zōē* (natural or bare life) is not helpful for Empedocles, for whom both terms are unstable. As Holmes (2019) points out, Greek usage in general does not support Agamben's dichotomy. Gheerbrant (2017, 74–82) surveys archaic usage of the two words apropos of B2/D42.

43. For my purposes it does not matter whether Empedocles envisioned one creation or two. O'Brien (1969) argues for two (cf. Sedley 2005; 2008b, 31–52, 62–71); Long (1974) for one. Furley (1987, 98–102) rejects any cyclical schema in favor of a linear evolution. Graham (1988) offers a clear synopsis of the issue.

the whole for Empedocles is fundamentally composed of parts. In contrast to Parmenides's unitary metaphysical Being, Empedocles's *arkhē* is plural and material. The word he chooses for his four elements, *rhizōmata*, is concrete and earthy: no abstract components (*stoikheia*) or indivisibles (*atoma*) for him.[44] The four roots combine to produce everything that is and was and will be, all the phenomena of our world and any other possible world. This bottom-up ontology prioritizes material parts over conceptual wholes. Thus we hear less of bodies than of limbs (*melē, guia*).[45] We hear of human limbs (B2.1/D42.1, B3.13/D44.13, B63/D164, B100.22/D201a.22). There was a time when body parts wandered alone (B57/D154), isolated limbs that were themselves "single-limbed" (*mounomelē eti ta guia*, B58/D153), and met to form monstrous combinations with "shadowy limbs" (*skierois . . . guiois*, B61/D156). But even in our current form human beings are just a massy collocation of limbs. "This [the alternation of Love and Strife] is conspicuous in the bulk of mortal limbs (*broteōn meleōn arideikton onkon*); sometimes we come together into one through Philotēs, all the limbs which have been allotted a body" (*hapanta guia, ta sōma lelonkhe*, D73.302–4/B20.1–3 = P. Strasb. c 2–4).[46] Not only do we have limbs: we are nothing but limbs, combining by chance (*lelonkhe*) to form ephemeral wholes. And it is not only us. Trees have limbs, as do birds and fish (B82/D198) and gods

44. Ancient commentators often call the roots *stoikheia*, but Empedocles himself does not use the word in the extant fragments. See e.g. Arist. *Metaph.* 1.4 985a32, crediting Empedocles with being the first to speak of four *stoikheia.* Sedley (2008b, 33n7) believes the idea that *rhizōmata* was Empedocles's regular term for the elements is a misleading impression produced by the fragmentary state of his text; he is right that it would have been more characteristic for Empedocles to use a variety of terms.

45. In addition to generic limbs (*melē, guia*) there are a plethora of specific body parts: heads, foreheads, and temples (*kephalē,* B134.1/D93.1; *korsai, metōpoi,* B57.1/D154.1; *prōira, krana, prosōpa,* B61.1–2/D156.2, B44/D123); necks (*aukhenes,* B57.1/D154.1), chests (*sterna,* B61.1/D156.1, B96.1/D192.1) and backs (*nōta,* B29.1/D92.1, B83.2/D197.2, B134.2/D93.2, B76.1/D74.1); arms and shoulders (B3.3/D44.3, B57.2/D154.2); hands (B23.3/D60.3, B100.10/D201a.10, B133.2/D9.2, B141/D31) and palms (B2.1/D42.1, B3.9/D44.9, B75.2/D200.2); knees (*gouna,* B29.2/D92.2, B134.3/D93.3) and feet (*podes,* B29.2/D92.2, B101.2/D232.2, B134.3/D93.3); bones (*ostea,* B96.3/D192.3); flesh (*sarx,* B98.5/D190.5, B99/D226, B100.2/D201a.2, B126/D19; *khrōs,* B100.17/D201a.17, B76.3/P. Strasb. b 2/D74.3); joints (*arthra,* B17.22/D73.253) and pores (*poroi,* B3.12/D44.12); mouths (*stomata,* B3.2/D44.2, B39.3/D113.3, B100.3/D201a.3), tongues (*glōssa,* B3.1/D44.1, B3.11/D44.11, B39.2/D113.2), nostrils (*rhinoi,* B76.2/P. Strasb. b 4/D74.5, B100.4/D201a.4,), ears (*ouata,* P. Strasb. a(ii) 21/D73.291; cf. B99/D226); and eyes (*ophthalmoi,* B133.1/D9.1, *ommata,* B17.21/D73.252, B86/D213, and their components, B84/D215); diaphragms (*phrenes,* B5/D258, B15.1/D52.1, B17.14/D73.245, B23.9/D60.9, B114.3/D6.3, B133.3/D9.3, B134.4/D93.4; *prapides,* B110.1/D257.1, B129.2, 4/D38.2, 4, B132.1/D8.1), and "shaggy genitals" (*mēdea,* B134.3/D93.3, B29.2/D92.2), to name only the most obvious. *Sōma* appears at B20.3/D73.304 (= P. Strasb. c 4), where it is defined in relation to its limbs (cf. B100.2/D201a.2). Trépanier (2014; see also 2017, 139–43) stresses the priority of part to whole in Empedocles.

46. I follow Laks-Most in reading *sunerkhometh'* ("we come together") in preference to Diels-Kranz's *sunerkhomen'* ("coming together"). The first-person plural form is adopted by most recent editors, but rejected by Algra and Mansfeld (2001); and Trépanier (2003). See the discussion in Laks 2002c. At stake in the textual choice is the identification of "us" with the limbs. The grammar of the lines also leaves it open whether a body is allotted limbs or vice versa: the relation between part and whole is reciprocal and purely fortuitous. Cf. below, n. 48.

(B115.3/D10.3) and the sun (B27.1/D89.1). The root elements are basic, but they too have parts (*merē*, B22.1/D101.1, B35.10–11/D75.10–11, B96.2/D192.2). Only Sphere, as the perfect unity of Love, lacks limbs. But that lack is located precisely in his limbs: "There is no civil war nor unseemly battle in his limbs" (*en meleessin*, B27a/D91). In marked contrast to Parmenides's sphere of Being (on which it may be modeled), for Empedocles the perfect whole is just a temporary agglomeration of parts that dispersed again when Neikos, "nurtured in [Sphere's] limbs" (*eni meleessin*, D94/B30), emerged, and "all the limbs (*guia*) of the god were shaken in succession" (B31/D95).[47] These scattered members are destined to form provisional bodies, but their nature is not determined by this destiny: the parts do not exist for the sake of wholeness (as Aristotle complains), and any whole they produce is not their final *telos* but merely one chapter in the life story of its component members.[48]

Empedocles's is thus a universe of material parts. All those parts, moreover, are in constant motion. Things rush and run. They flow and fly. They rise up and leap and whirl and wander.[49] The elements are always on the move, coming together and separating (B17.1–12/D73.233–243), wandering (*plankhthent(a)*, P. Strasb. a(ii) 16/D73.286), running through one another (*theonta*, B17.34/D73.265,

47. Cf. B29/D92, B134/D93: "His limbs are not furnished with a man's head; two branches do not dart from his back; no feet, nor swift knees, nor shaggy genitals." It is not even clear that Sphere could be unitary, since if it contains all things it must contain Strife.

48. Arist. *Metaph.* 1.4 985a21–29 (<A37/R11a). For a helpful comparison of Empedocles's and Aristotle's causes see Inwood 2001, 68–75. There are finalities in Empedocles's cosmology, but they are all local and provisional. B62/D157 describes how, as like elements were drawn together, rough outlines (*oulophueis . . . tupoi*) of human beings sprang up from the earth, "not yet (*oute ti pō*) revealing the lovely frame (*eraton demas*) of limbs nor a voice nor the limb that is native to men." The inchoate joining of limbs is governed by a goal of wholeness, "the lovely frame" of the complete human body. The noun *tupoi,* outlines or models, may suggest that this frame is the work of a demiurge, and Philotēs is presented as a demiurge in other fragments (B23/D60, B59/D149, B86/D213, B87/D214, B95/D217). But here these *tupoi* "were springing up" (*exanetellon*) spontaneously from the earth, and evolution seems driven less by a final form immanent within each creature (as in Aristotle) than by the finality of the poet's own perspective, which is "not off-the-mark nor ignorant" (B62.3/D157.3). It is the poet who is aiming at the mark of complete humans, not nature itself. Cf. B20.3/D73.304 where the limbs are "allotted" a body (*sōma lelonkhe*), a verb that implies random selection, and B53/D105: at the creation of the cosmos air "happened (*sunekurse*) to be running in this way then, but often in a different way." On Empedocles's "curious cocktail of artistic creation and sheer accident," see Sedley 2008b, 52–62.

49. In addition to forms of *bainō* and *erkhomai,* some of Empedocles's favorite verbs of motion include *aissō* "shoot" (B29.1/D92.1, B134.2/D93.2, B100.6–7/D201a.6–7, B134.5/D93.5, P. Strasb. a(ii) 3, 8, 12/D73.273, 278, 282), *theō* "run" (B17.34/D73.265, B21.13/D77a.13, B26.3/D77b.3, B53/D105, P. Strasb. a(ii) 13, 15/D73.283, 285), *thrōiskō* "leap" (B84.5/D215.5, B100.8, 25/D201a.8, 25, B105.1/D240.1), *ornumi* "arise" (B2.9/D42.9, B30.2/D94.2, B111.4/D43.4), *helissō* "whirl" (B17.25/D73.256, B45/D139, B46/D137), *plazō, planaō* "wander" (B20.5/D73.306, B22.3/D101.3, B57.2, 3/D154.2, 3, B58/D153, P. Strasb. a(ii) 16, c6/D73.286, 306), *piptō* "fall" (B59.2/D149.2, B100.13, 21/D201a.13, 21, B104/D107, B133.3/D9.3), *blastanō* "grow" (B21.10/D77a.10, B57.1/D154.1, B146.3/D39.3, P. Strasb. a(i) 9/D73.270). See also below on flowing and pouring and on augmenting. Often words conveying motion are piled up as at B100.7/D201a.7: "aether rushes down seething in a furious swell" (*aithēr paphlazōn kataissetai oidmati margōi*).

B21.13/D77a.13, B26.3/D77b.3, *theesken*, P. Strasb. a(ii) 15/D73.285). So are the forces: Aphrodite whirls among the roots (*helissomenēn*, B17.25/D73.256); Neikos leaps up from Sphere (*anorouse*, B30.2/D94.2). The celestial bodies likewise whirl (*helissetai*, B45/D139, B46/D137) and run (*theei*, P. Strasb. a(ii) 13/D73.283). Human bodies move but are also alive with internal movement as blood "darts back" (*apaixēi*, B100.6/D201a.6), "leaps up" (*anathrōiskēi*, B100.8/D201a.8), and "surging through the limbs rushes backward into the interior" (*kladassomenon dia guiōn . . . palinorson apaixeie mukhonde*, B100.22–23/D201a.22–23; cf. B105.1/D240.1). Thought too is in motion: mind (*phrēn*) "darts (*kataissousa*) with swift thoughts through the entire cosmos" (B134.4–5/D93.4–5); cleverness (*mētis*) arises (*orōren*, B2.9/D42.9) and increases (*aexetai*, B106/D243); belief (*pistis*) assaults the heart (*hormē*, B114.3/D6.3). The poem itself "rushes through" the innards of its listener (B4.3/D47.3).[50]

This motion produces all the phenomena of the cosmos as things "happen upon" one another in their rushing (B104/D107, B59.2/D149.2, cf. B98.1/D190.1). Aristotle objects to the contingency of these encounters and takes Empedocles to task for relying on chance, *tukhē*, in his cosmogonic theory.[51] It is true that these combinations are not governed by Anankē (as is the alternation of Love and Strife, B115.1/D10.1), but neither are they completely random. Instead, these encounters are motivated by the parts' own will and desire. In Empedocles's ontology there are no inanimate things. All things feel desire and move under its impetus. Limbs wander alone (B20.5/D73.306), solitary arms "bereaved" of shoulders (*eunides*, B57.2/D154.2) and eyes "begging" for foreheads (*penēteuonta*, B57.3/D154.3). Plants too desire, perceive, feel joy and sadness, and have mind (A70/D250a, c). Earth, water, fire, and air have their own natural affinities: those most suited to mixing "love one another (*allēlois esterktai*), made similar by Aphrodite" while "enemies [are those that] keep most distant from one another . . . in every way strangers to unification and terribly sad" (*pantēi sunginesthai aēthea kai mala lugra*, B22.4–8/D101.4–8).[52] In this they follow the root elements, which are not passive matter shaped by the divine agency of Love and Strife but, as Rowett has stressed, meet those forces with their own active desire.[53] They "come together

50. "Know, with the argument having rushed through into your innards" (*gnōthi, diassēthentos eni splankhnoisi logoio*). *Diassēthentos* is Diels's suggestion in place of Clement's *diatmēthentos* (retained by most editors). I will return to language's motion below. For *logos* as Empedocles's own argument cf. B17.26/D73.257, B35.2/D75.2, B131.4/D7.4.

51. Arist. *Ph.* 2.4 196a17–24; cf. *Gen. corr.* 2.6 334a1–7 and the discussion at Inwood 2001, 68–75. Simplicius, in his commentary on the *Physics* passage, lists examples of *tukhē* in Empedocles: B53/D105, B59.2/149.2, B98.1/D190.1, B85/D191, B75.2/D200.2, B103/D242. On the nature of necessity in Empedocles, see Osborne (2005): she argues that it is arbitrary but not determinist. Cf. Laks 2005.

52. This is Laks-Most's translation of B22/D101, which brings out the emotional tone of the Greek. Cf. B91/D69: water has a natural affinity with wine but "does not wish" (*ouk ethelei*) to mix with oil. At B115.12/D10.12 all the elements hate (*stugeousi*) the *daimōn*.

53. Rowett 2016, expanding on Osborne 1987a, 46. Cf. Wright 1981, 233–34. Curd (2016) emphasizes the structuring force of Love and Strife's thoughts and emotions.

in love and long for one another" (*sun d'ebē en Philotēti kai allēloisi potheitai*, B21.8/D77a.8); they come together willingly (*thelēma*, B35.6/D75.6), even ardently (*epokheito*, B90/D68), and are reluctant to be separated (*aekazomenoisin*, P. Strasb. d 2/D76.2; cf. B62.6/D157.6). Everything in Empedocles's cosmos is animated by will and intent, from the individual roots all the way up to Sphere as he "rejoices in his circular solitude" (*moniēi periēgei gaiōn*, B27.4/D89.4, B28/D90). "Know that all things have thought and a share of mind" (*panta gar isthi phronēsin ekhein kai nōmatos aisan*, B110.10/D257.10; cf. B103/D242).

In her discussion of this animated world, Rowett rejects what she calls "a reductive materialist analysis" that sees the elements as inert matter naively described with anthropomorphizing metaphor. Taking Empedocles's language literally, she views the elements as "divine agents, with the capacity to make decisions and act on them."[54] I provisionally follow her in reading this language literally (although we will return to the problem of metaphor in the next section). However, I believe the dichotomy between inert matter and divine agents poses a false alternative, one that brings Empedocles's world to life only by extending to matter the liveliness of a hypostasized (indeed, divinized) human agency. Arguing against such a dichotomy, Tim Ingold proposes that matter does not need to be anthropomorphized or divinized to become animate: it is intrinsically animate. It interacts continuously with the world around it, changing in response to its environment and changing its environment in the process.[55] Every thing, human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, is engaged in its own process of becoming, "pursuing the line of its own movement" in a complex weave with other beings in motion, each of them "bent upon the tasks of life."[56] *Bios*, in his view, is not the exclusive possession of an anthropomorphic agent but simply the "meshwork" of such interwoven lines of flight. Each of those lines is, in a sense, an autobiography, the trajectory of a being in the process of becoming. But it writes the life not of a singular, discrete *autos* but of a tightly interconnected assemblage of mutually transforming parts.[57]

Ingold's meshwork well describes Empedocles's ontology, an ontology neither of inert material objects nor of divinized agential subjects but of lines of flight. In B17/D73.233–66, in a passage full of Parmenidean resonances, the poet asserts the

54. Rowett 2016, 93, 82.

55. Ingold 2011, 28–29.

56. Ingold 2011, 13, 6; see also 71. "Lines of flight" is also a term of art for Deleuze and Guattari (e.g., 1987, 24–25, 222–23, 277). Ingold does not distinguish his concept from theirs, although he says he came to it independently (13–14). He develops the idea in Ingold 2007 and 2015.

57. Ingold 2011, 160: "For the things of this world *are* their stories, identified not by fixed attributes but by their paths of movement in an unfolding field of relations." "Assemblage" (*agencement*) is Deleuze and Guattari's term for a provisional and contingent collocation of heterogeneous elements (individuals and things but also lines of motion, intensities, signifiers) in relations of mutual transformation with unpredictable emergent properties (1987, 4, 22–23 et passim).

eternal and unchanging being of the root elements. Like Parmenides's Being, these elements fill all time and space, without beginning or end (B17.30–33/D73.261–64). They can be neither augmented nor diminished,

> ἀλλ' αὐτ' ἔστιν ταῦτα, δι' ἀλλήλων δὲ θέοντα
> γίγνεται ἄλλοτε ἄλλα καὶ ἠνεκὲς αἰὲν ὁμοῖα. (B17.34–35/D73.265–66)[58]
>
> but these very things are, and running through each other
> they become different at different times and are always continuously
> the same.

These lines contain Empedocles's strongest ontological language. The demonstrative pronoun (*tauta*) is Empedocles's usual way of referring to the root elements, but here it is reinforced, exceptionally, by the intensive adjective *auta* ("these things themselves, these very things") and the existential form of the verb "to be."[59] Emphatically themselves, *auta*, the elements are eternally and unfailingly the same as themselves (*ēnekes aien homoia*). This identity, this self-same selfness, constitutes their being (*estin*) and being in general.

But that being is itself in motion: the elements are "running through each other." Heraclitus (as we saw in chapter 2) stabilized becoming within an eternal circle of sameness. Empedocles, with his alternation of Love and Strife, may seem to do something similar. Earlier in fragment B17/D73 we were told that the elements, brought together in Philotēs and dispersed in Neikos, are continually transformed from one to many and many to one, and

> τῇι μὲν γίγνονταί τε καὶ οὔ σφισιν ἔμπεδος αἰών·
> ἥι δὲ διαλλάσσοντα διαμπερὲς οὐδαμὰ λήγει,
> ταύτηι δ' αἰὲν ἔασιν ἀκίνητοι κατὰ κύκλον. (B17.11–13/D73.242–44 = B26.10–12/D77b.10–12)
>
> in that way they are becoming and they have no stable lifetime,
> but to the extent that they never cease changing continually,
> to that extent they always are, unmoving in a circle.

In these lines, the unsteady life of constant becoming seems to be stabilized, even immobilized, in the cycle of Love and Strife. Situated within that circle, becoming (*gignontai*) and changing (*diallassonta*) are transmuted into eternal, invariable being (*aien easin akinētoi*). But the poem's insistence on motion places

58. Simplicius's *de* in the first line seems to me preferable to the papyrus's *ge,* which creates an atypical asyndeton. See Martin and Primavesi (1999, 172–75), who defend the latter. On the Parmenidean echoes, see Bollack 1969, 76–77; Curd 1998, 156–58; and Inwood 2001, 32–33.

59. See Martin and Primavesi (1999, 171–72) on the force of *estin* here. They translate: "Il n'existe que ces choses elles-mêmes." Laks-Most (D73.265–66) translate *estin* as connective and *auta* as predicate: "But these are themselves." Inwood (2001, 36) compares *aut' estin tauta* to Platonic Forms, as well as Parmenides's Being. See further O'Brien 2016.

the emphasis not on the unchanging rotation of the whole but on the endless transformation of the parts, and the circle of immobile being in B17.13/D73.244 caps twelve lines in which the elements are described only by—indeed, simply *as*—unceasing motion: they are their augmentation (*ēuxēthē*, B17.1/D73.233) and dispersion (*diephu*, B17.2/D73.234; cf. B17.5, 10/D73.237, 241), their transformation (*allassonta*, B17.6/D73.238; *diallassonta*, B17.12/D73.243) as they come together (*sunerkhomen'*, B17.7/D73.239) and are borne apart (*dikh' hekasta phoreumena*, B17.8/D73.240).[60] On a molar level, the frenetic activity of the roots may look like a stable and motionless circle. But Empedocles's eye is trained on the molecular level, down among the darting elements and rushing limbs. Viewed from this angle, being resolves into chaotic becoming: it is only to the extent (*hēi . . . tautēi*) that the roots are always changing that they eternally *are*. Parmenides created his radical ontology by transforming a verb into a noun, *To Eon*. Empedocles articulates an ontology of verbs. His *auta tauta* – the things themselves in their eternal identity—*are* only in their interlaced and mutually transformative running. Empedocles's is a metaphysics *of* motion and *in* motion.

If autobiography, as Olney suggests, is the stabilization of life's Heraclitean becoming into a singular Parmenidean Being, Empedocles refuses that process. *On Nature* tells a story not of a fixed and monadic *autos* but of plural *auta* and ultimately of *allēla*, "each others." Running through each other, each driven by its own individual will and wishes, the elements intersect and combine in unforeseen ways to create a biosphere of infinitely varied and intimately connected phenomena: "From these all things that were and are and will be, and trees grew and men and women, beasts and birds and water-nourished fish and long-lived gods greatest in honors. For these very things are, and running through each other they become different in shape" (B21.9–14/D77a.9–14; cf. B26.3–4/D77b.3–4). In place of phylogenetic trees, things proliferate like weeds, with a crazy rhizomatic fertility that jumps the boundaries between phyla, materially connecting humans, animals, and plants: "The same things become hairs and leaves and the thick wings of birds and scales on stout limbs" (B82/D198; cf. B83/D197). Thus plants bloom (B77/D251, B78/D253; cf. B21.10/D77a.10), but so do humans and animals and gods (*eblastēse*, B21.10–12/D77a.10–12; cf. A72/D151, B99/D226). Trees "lay eggs" that are olives (B79/D254), and exude wine from their bark (B81/D256).

The result is a virtual Amazon of biodiversity: "from these [the elements] mixing flowed out countless races of mortal things, fit together in all sorts of forms, a marvel to see" (B35.16–17/D75.16–17). These forms include the often-mentioned "trees and men and women and beasts and birds and sea-nurtured fish and long-lived

60. The phrase "they never cease changing continually" (*diallassonta diamperes oudama lēgei,* B17.12/D73.243) is itself in motion. It is a repeated refrain in this section of the poem (B17.6, 11–13/D73.238, 242–244, B26.11–12/D77b.11–12). It also occurs in a variation with "darting" (*aissonta*) in place of "changing" (*allassonta*) to describe existence under Strife at P.Strasb. a(ii) 3, a(ii) 8/D73.273, 278.

gods, greatest in honor" (B21.10–12/D77a.10–12; cf. B20.6–7/D73.307–308, B23.6–8/D60.6–8, P. Strasb. a(i) 9–a(ii) 2/D73.270–272, B117/D13) but also "sea-dwelling heavy-backed" mollusks, "stony-skinned trumpet-shells and tortoises" (D74/B76/P. Strasb. b), "late-born pomegranates and succulent apples" (B80/D255), hedgehogs bristling with "sharp-pointed hairs" (B83/D197), "mild-shining," "grey-eyed moon" (B40/D125, B42/D132), and "blind-eyed, lonely night" (B49/D228).[61]

Tracing the rampant productivity of elemental combination, Empedocles writes a biography that ramifies the *autos* in all directions. The divine *egō* who tells with such pathos of his suffering in exile and the philosophical *egō* who insists on the veracity of his teachings are just parts of a vast mesh of interconnected parts, each with its own self-willed trajectory and thus each with its own autobiography. But these autobiographies are always *allēlobiographies*, stories of life together, running through one another.

Instead of rising above life to write it, then, the human subject is simply one thing in this teeming assemblage of things. Indeed, that subject is itself an assemblage, a rushing relay of parts whose lines of flight traverse the boundaries between inside and outside and dissolve any notion of the individual. I end this section with an extended example, B100/D201a's famous comparison of respiration to the working of a clepsydra.[62] The analogy seems clear enough on the surface, but rather than compare two discrete phenomena, one biological and one mechanical, the simile merges the two into a weird hybrid of the organic and inorganic. In the process, it not only displaces the human agent. It also foregrounds the agency of Empedocles's language, which describes respiration with tremendous detail and artistry even as it participates actively in its working. This dual function points to the challenges of writing a material ontology that will be taken up at greater length in the next section.

First there is the body, made up of "pipes of flesh" (*sarkōn suringes*, 2) that extend to the body's surface and "are pierced with thick furrows at their mouths (*stomiois*), right through the lowest ends of their nostrils (*rhinōn*)" (3–4). Respiratory channels are fleshy pipes: a *surinx* is a shepherd's pipe or anything shaped like it. The word evokes the breath required to play the flute, but these flutes are inside the body, as if the breath of the creature is reproduced in fractal form by his

61. Porter (2010, 151–58, 2025) stresses the aesthetic beauty of this world and the sublimity of its "irrepressible vitality" (2016, 416–21). While heterogeneous, this cosmos is not egalitarian. Gods have more honor and survive longer than other beings; lions are superior among animals, laurels among trees (B127/D36). It is also worth noting that Empedocles is relatively uninterested in inanimate beings and sometimes seems to conflate *panta* with *thnēta.*

62. The clepsydra in this fragment is not the water clock but a copper utensil for conveying small quantities of water. Last (1924) explains how it worked; Bollack (1969, 476) provides nice illustrations. The breathing subject of the fragment is not necessarily human. Its opening line—"in this way all things inhale and exhale"—situates its analysis within a common *bios,* since "all things have a share of breath" (B102/D231). The mechanics of the clepsydra, Empedoclean respiration, and the comparison between them are thoroughly discussed by O'Brien (1970, 146–54, 176–79) and Gheerbrant (2017, 343–83).

internal parts, which themselves have parts, "mouths" and "nostrils."[63] At the same time, as a technical artifact the *surinx* already crosses the boundary of the analogy to the clepsydra: the body is a pipe even before it is compared to one. The fragment goes on to describe the violent process by which blood and air fill these pipes in alternation: blood "rushes out" and "leaps up" (*apaixēi*, 6; *anathrōiskēi*, 8); air "rushes down, seething in a furious swell" (*paphlazōn kataissetai oidmati margōi*, 7). In this churning activity, the roots mingle: aether rushes like water (*oidmati*, 7); earth is present in the furrows (*aloxin*, 3) of the veins. The interior of the body is a complex and dynamic cosmos.

An anacoluthon marks a shift to the analogy: "as when a child playing with a clepsydra of gleaming copper" (8–9). This *pais klepsudrēi paizousa* may recall Heraclitus's *pais paizōn* (Her. B52/D76): for both philosophers, innocent actions and everyday objects not only symbolize but instantiate the fundamental workings of the world and bind the individual tightly to them. Empedocles's clepsydra is an assemblage of diverse bodies—copper pipe (9), human hand (10), "thick flow" of water (14), and "bulky" air (13)—each going about its own "task of life" within this intricate meshwork of metal and skin (17). Dipping the pipe in water, the girl sets the mechanism in motion, but her actions are just a part, and not the most active part, of the drama.[64]

> αἰθὴρ δ' ἐκτὸς ἔσω λελιημένος ὄμβρον ἐρύκει,
> ἀμφὶ πύλας ἠθμοῖο δυσηχέος ἄκρα κρατύνων,
> εἰσόκε χειρὶ μεθῆι, τότε δ' αὖ πάλιν, ἔμπαλιν ἢ πρίν,
> πνεύματος ἐμπίπτοντος ὑπεκθέει αἴσιμον ὕδωρ. (B100.18–21/D201a.18–21)
>
> Air from outside, longing to enter, prevents the rainstorm
> around the portals, commanding the heights of the harsh-echoing sieve,
> until she releases it from her hand, and then again in turn, the reverse of before,
> as the breath falls upon it, the water runs out from beneath in equal measure.

In this miniature Homeric battle scene the clepsydra becomes a besieged citadel, with the elements waging war for control of the instrument.[65] As the elements

63. The word *surinx* becomes common in medical writing to refer to the channels of the body (LSJ II.4), but as is often the case, Empedocles seems to be the first to use it in this way. *Rhinōn* may be from *rhinos* (skin) instead of *rhis* (nostril): Bollack 1969, 481; and Wright 1981, 245–46. On the "transfusion" of tenor and vehicle in this simile, see Garani 2007, 111–14.

64. Her agency is strongly marked at the beginning (*paizousa,* 9; *theisa,* 10; *apostegasēi,* 14) but as the passage goes on Empedocles's tendency to leave grammatical subjects unexpressed makes it difficult to tell which actions are hers. She is generally supplied as the subject of *ekhēi* (16) and *methēi* (20). At 17 she appears in the instrumental form of "human flesh" (*broteōi khroi*). The human agent is submerged within the process she sets in motion. The child's gender may link her to Aphrodite (Bollack 1965, 244). Rashed (2018, 183–204) associates her with Persephone, whose presence he detects throughout the fragments.

65. *Aithēr* strives to get in with the zeal of an attacking warrior (*leliēmenos: Il.* 4.465, 5.690, 12.106, 16.552) and the portals are likened to city gates (*pulas*). *Dusēkhes* is a common epithet of war in Homer, with *polemoio dusēkheos* frequently occurring in the same line position as *ēthmoio dusēkheos* (*Il.* 2.686,

engage, each driven by its own heroic impetus, the human agent becomes all but irrelevant. Language too enters the fray: in the plosive repetition of its back-and-forth (*palin empalin ē prin, pneumatos empiptontos hupektheei*, 20–21) words become the sound of the "harsh-echoing sieve," resounding through the implement and contributing to the chaos of battle.

The battle then shifts from the clepsydra to the breathing body. "Just as the delicate blood surging through the limbs when it rushes backward into the interior, a raging flow of air comes out in a wave and when it [the blood] leaps up, it exhales again an equal amount backward" (22–25). These lines closely echo those that preceded this extended simile, forming a ring composition that separates the mechanical vehicle from its biological tenor. Between the "delicate blood" (*teren haima*, 6, 22) of the latter and the "delicate body" (*teren demas*, 11) of the former, however, the line between literal and metaphoric becomes hard to discern: the language literally overflows the bounds of the simile. Further, as Empedocles's words rush and flow across the divide, merging flesh and metal, body and machine, we also lose the clear lines that would define a self, united in itself and distinct from its environment. With every breath we witness a clash of elements that besiege the walls of the *autos*, exposing it to an outside that is already within. Meanwhile the little girl plays, oblivious to the complex physics she is enacting.

And yet, the *autos* lost within Empedocles's materialist theory can be rediscovered behind it, at its origin. This fragment is one of the most celebrated examples of Empedocles's skill with metaphor, a skill recognized already in antiquity.[66] The ostentatious artistry of the fragment recalls the poetic *egō* even where he is not overtly present: the scene is focalized through his eyes, not through the girl's. Empedocles's physics displaces the *autos*, dispersing its qualities across a universe of lively, intentional things (*auta tauta*) and the mutual relations among them (*allēla*). But *graphē* imports an authorial *autos* even where the first-person voice is absent. There is thus one *autos* Empedocles cannot eliminate: himself as author. In this biosphere of constant movement and random joinings, where everything is always in the process of becoming and nothing has a "secure lifetime" (*empedos aiōn*, B17.11/D73.242), one thing does appear to be *empedos*: the poet, Empedocles himself. "'I' is ineliminable."[67] This places Empedocles in tension with his own ontology and reiterates at the metalevel of poetic production

7.376, 7.395, 11.524, 13.535, 18.307). *Aisimon hudōr* perhaps recalls the *aisimon hēmar* that signifies imminent defeat in Homer (*Il.* 8.72, 21.100, 22.212, *Od.* 16.280).

66. Arist. fr. 70 Rose (< A1/R1b): "being skilled at metaphor (*metaphorētikos*) and making use of the other poetic devices." For appraisals of Empedocles's use of metaphor and simile, see Kranz 1938, 100–9; Snell 1953, 214–18; Bollack 1965, 295–302; Van Groningen 1971, 182–84; Garani 2007, 95–220; and Gheerbrant 2017, 271–386. The language in the lines introducing the analogy (9–11) draws attention to its own aesthetics: the pipe is of "bright copper" (*dieipeteos,* a rare word, if the reading is correct); the girl's hand, "well-formed" (*eueidei*); the water, "silvery" (*argupheoio*).

67. Kirk, Raven, and Schofield 1983, 321, quoted above. Obbink (1993, 87–88) notes Empedocles's allusion to his own name at B17.11/D73.242 and in the *empedophulla kai empedokarpa* trees of B77–78/D251–52. Cf. Rashed 2018, 197–98.

the split in the *autos* we witnessed in the last section: the contradiction between an *egō* who narrates his past lives and a physics that vitiates such a narration. Empedocles cannot write *bios* without extracting himself from it, even against his will, and positing himself as both the stabilizing origin of and the sole exception to his dynamic ontology.

GRAPHĒ

Empedocles's innovative poetic style is an attempt to evade this contradiction: to get over himself, as it were, and to write *bios* not from above but from within. It is an attempt "to see the grass in things and in words" and to articulate those rhizomatic connections between words and things. In fact, for Empedocles words *are* things. This means that language does not imitate the world any more than a falling rock imitates gravity. Instead, it enacts its fundamental physical principles. Empedocles's unique poetics are an attempt to activate this immediate, nonmimetic relation between language and the world. But this experiment in radical linguistics is inherently contradictory, as we saw already in the last section, for in the very act of writing Empedocles inevitably reasserts his own authorial *egō*, and the more so the more innovative his style.

Empedocles is self-conscious about his poetics. In B9/D54 he comments explicitly on the difficulty of expressing novel ideas in traditional language. What people call birth and death are actually the mixing and separation of elements: "It is not right, the way they speak of it, but I myself too comply with the norm."[68] To the extent that he does follow linguistic norms, however, he does so in a supremely inventive and idiosyncratic way that calls constant attention to his authorial presence. Phrases like "late-born pomegranates and succulent apples" (*opsigonoi te sidai kai huperphloia mēla*, B80/D255) or the hedgehog's "sharp-pointed hairs" (*oxubeleis khaitai*, B83/D197) are conspicuous in their artistry, adopting Homeric vocabulary to new ends and combining it in novel ways.[69] On the one hand, these innovations illustrate Empedocles's linguistic materialism. Words come into being in the same way as everything else in the cosmos. Lexical limbs combine in surprising forms, and Empedocles's many *hapax legomena* (some sixty-three of

68. Following the text proposed by Wilamowitz (1930, 246) in the (corrupt) last line. On the problem of correct speech, see further B3.4/D44.4, B8/D53, B17.24/D73.255. Empedocles also remarks on his own practice of repetition ("it is good to say twice what is necessary," B25/D45; cf. B17.1, 16/D73.233, 247) and his nonlinear argumentative structure (B24/D46).

69. Mackenzie 2021, 174. *Opsigonoi* in Homer refers to "late-born" humans. *Huperphloia* is a hapax. Plutarch, who quotes B80/D255, wonders over its meaning and notes that Empedocles "was not in the habit of beautifying things with the most attractive epithets, like flowery colors, just for the sake of stylistic elegance, but composed each thing as an illustration of some essence or force" (*Quaest. conv.* 683E). *Oxubelēs* ("sharp-pointed," B83/D197) is used by Homer of an arrow (*Il.* 4.126); at B40/D125 it describes the rays of the sun. *Khaitai* ("hair") denotes human hair, animal manes, and the foliage of trees (LSJ s.v.).