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. Emped-ocles 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.

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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, nonmi-metic 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 explic-itly 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 pres-ence. 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

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68. Following the text proposed by Wilamowitz (1930, 246) in the (corrupt) last line. On the prob-lem 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.).

them in the extant fragments) are the material product, not just the description, of this creative process.[70] By the same token, his constant Homeric quotations, allusions, and echoes instantiate the fundamental principle that there is no birth or death, only the mixing and remixing of elements.[71] To that extent, as we shall see, language is simply part of life, subject to the same physical forces and natural laws as everything else. On the other hand, these artistic devices are obviously the invention of a masterful poet who stands outside the world to represent it, indeed, who creates that world in representing it. Inscribing the authorial *autos* at and as the origin of his *biou graphē*—the origin not just of the *graphē* but even of the *bios*—Empedocles's poetic style risks falling back into the idealist metaphysics of autobiography that his materialist physics repudiates.

Language is one part of the assemblage of parts that make up Empedocles's biosphere and like every other part it is material and lively. *Logos* produces knowledge by entering the listener's innards (*diassēthentos eni splankhnoisi logoio*, B4.3/D47.3). It invades the listener (*logou stolon*, B17.26/D73.257), entering his mind in an "onslaught of persuasion" (*pistios hormē*, B114.3/D6.3). An unpersuasive argument is said to be materially defective, *lipoxulos*, literally "lacking wood" (B21.2/D77a.2, B71.1/D61.1). That Empedocles means this literally is suggested by his theory of cognition, which works via the principle of elemental attraction: "By earth we perceive earth, by water water, by air shining air, and by fire destructive fire, Love by love, and Strife by terrible strife" (B109/D207; cf. B107/D241, A86.10/D218). Thinking is a physical process not unlike breath in B100/D201a, a mutually transformative interchange between elements within us and those in the environment. Thus "cleverness (*mētis*) will augment for humans in relation to what is present" (B106/D243). Empedocles's words participate directly and reciprocally in this productive interchange: "Come, listen to my words (*muthōn*): for learning (*mathē*) will augment your mind (*phrenas*)" (B17.14/D73.245). In the aural echo *muthōn/mathē* language is transformed into knowledge before our eyes through contact with the *phrenes* (the mind but also the diaphragm), which will in turn be transformed through the encounter.[72]

Words move and flow and change. B35/D75 begins "I will come back to this path of songs (*es poron humnōn*) which I spoke before, channeling off (*exokheteuōn*)

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70. The figure for *hapax legomena* is derived from the index verborum of Wright (1981, 319–46): the majority of these are unparalleled compounds of familiar words, comprehensible but unexpected. On Empedocles's lexical innovation, see Gemelli Marciano 1990, 83–164; and Willi 2008, 202–20.

71. For examples see the index entries at Bollack 1965, 385–86, 1969, 616–17; and Wright 1981, 359.

72. Gheerbrant 2022, 274–75. The poet's words will enter Pausanias's body through the ears and eyes (B3.12–13/D44.12–13). They penetrate, passing beyond the sense organs (P. Strasb. a(ii) 21–22/D73.291–92) until they reach the heart, "for the blood around the heart is thought (*noēma*) for mortals" (B105/D240). Cf. B129/D38, B133/D9. Empedocles's physiology of thought is well explained by Long (1966). For a different view, see Kamtekar (2009), who believes knowledge by likeness means analogical reasoning.

argument from argument" (B35.1–2/D75.1–2). The "path of song," as we noted in chapter 1, is a virtual cliché in archaic poetry.[73] Traveling this path, Empedocles, like Parmenides, would seem to assert control over the trajectory of his argument. But even as he does, the road dissolves under his feet: the path turns liquid (a *poros* is also a channel or stream) in the fluid imagery of *exokhetueōn*, and the poet-traveler finds himself bailing as he heads into the whirling depths of Neikos (*benthos dinēs*, B35.3–4/D75.3–4). A "pure stream" channeled from a holy mouth (*katharēn okheteusate pēgēn*, B3.2/D44.2), Empedocles's language joins the flow of other things in the cosmos: the tribes of creatures "poured out" from the mixed elements (*kheito*, B35.7, 16/D75.7, 16), the seed "poured into pure places" to form embryos (*ekhuthē*, B65/D172), the seas of blood that splash around the heart to produce thought (B105/D240) or that ebb and flow in respiration (B100.6–7, 22–24/D201a.6–7, 22–24). Even "dense and solid things flow forth from the earth" (*ek d'aiēs prorheousi thelemna te kai stereōpa*, B21.6/D77a.6).

Moving and flowing, Empedocles's language, like the roots themselves, has no *empedos aiōn*. This produces some extraordinary linguistic slippages, both syntactic and semantic. We might note, for example, Empedocles's frequent shifts of subject and casual fluctuation between singular and plural, grammatical irregularities that render sense itself slippery.[74] Or the way the meaning of words fluctuates such that, for instance, *theoi* are sometimes immortals, sometimes long-lived mortals, destabilizing not just the semantics of this common word but the entire theology and anthropology it entails.[75] "Running through each other," words lose their stable semantic being.[76] Or think of Empedocles's constant repetitions with

73. Cf. chapter 1, n. 15, and on Empedocles's use of this image, Nünlist 2005, 78–80; and Gheerbrant 2017, 215–42. Empedocles's path is not linear but aleatory and branching so as "joining some peaks of words to others, not to complete a single path" (B24/D46). The poet follows this path but also takes detours and returns (B35.1/D75.1); he doubles back and repeats portions (B17.14–16/D73.245–47).

74. See, e.g., B17.6–13/D73.238–244 and B17.27–35/D73.258–266, where the neuter plural elements alternate between singular and plural verbs (and apparently take a masculine plural adjective, *akinētoi,* in 13/244), or the switch between singular and plural subjects at P. Strasb. d 3–15/D76.3–15 and B115.3–8/ D10.3–8, or the odd duals at B23.2–5/D60.2–5 and B137.6/D29.6. See too B3.5/D44.5 where the unmarked change of addressee is so jarring that some editors print this as two separate fragments, and B35.10–12/D75.10–12 where the subject of each verb is uncertain.

75. On *theoi,* see Inwood 2001, 55–59. Sometimes Empedocles seems to use the word in its standard sense, as when he refers to Necessity's oracle as "ancient decree of the gods" (B115.1/D10.1; cf. *makarōn,* B115.6/D10.6, and the list of gods at B128.1/D25.1). But "long-lived gods highest in honors" also appear alongside birds and bushes and men and women in the lists of *thnēta* produced under Strife (P. Strasb. a (ii) 2/D73.272, B21.12/D77a.12, B23.8/D60.8). Since for the Greeks *theoi* were by definition immortal, a mortal *theos* is a contradiction in terms. But immortality too is volatile, for we are told that only the roots are immortal (B17.30–35/D73.261–266) but they can become mortal (B35.14/D75.14), while the poet claims to be immortal (B112.4/D4.4; cf. B147/D40). Long (2017) thus proposes that for Empedocles immortality means continuity not endless duration. See further Ferella (2024, 185–216) on the poet's understanding of divinity.

76. Perhaps the most extreme example of this semantic slippage is the word *zōra* at B35.15/D75.15: the adjective usually means "pure" but in this context must mean "mixed" (Solmsen 1967). Even proper

variation, among which are the very lines that describe his ontology: "But these very things are, and running through each other they become different at different times and are always continuously the same" (B17.34–35/D73.265–66) recurs as "these very things are, and running through each other they become different in shape; to such an extent does mixture transform them" (B21.13–14/D77a.13–14) and "these very things are, and running through each other they become men and the races of other beasts" (B26.3–4/D77b.3–4).[77] The language in which Empedocles articulates his mobile ontology is itself in motion, returning in different forms, transformed by what it encounters.

This language does not stand outside of things but instead is rooted in them. Indeed, it *is* the roots of things, spreading among them with its weird fertility and entangling them in the meshwork of *bios*. When Empedocles writes "the same things become hairs and leaves and the thick wings of birds and scales on stout limbs" (B82/D198), he is not only positing a fundamental equivalence among all beings; his language actively forges that equivalence through its syntax: "and . . . and . . . and." This syntactic construction occurs again and again and again in Empedocles's fragments. It yokes boy and girl and bush and bird and voyaging sea-leaping fish (D13/B117; cf. B9.2–3/D54.2–3, B20.6–7/D73.307–308, B21.10–12/D77a.10–12, B23.6–8/D60.6–8, P. Strasb. a(i) 9–a(ii) 2/D73.270–272). The four elements are introduced in this form (B6/D57), as are their phenomenal instantiations, "sun and earth and heaven and sea" (B22.2/D101.2, cf. B17.18/D73.249, B21.3–5/D77a3–5, B38.3–4/D122.3–4, B71/D61, B115.9–11/D10.9–11). This polysyndetic syntax joins the diverse beings of the cosmos, neither conflating them in a relation of identity nor subordinating them in a relation of hierarchy but binding them in a multidirectional mesh of horizontal connections.[78] Meanwhile, vivid

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names, the most rigid of designators, are flexible in Empedocles's poetics: in B6/D57 he introduces the root elements as "bright Zeus and Hera bringer of life and Aidoneus and Nestis, who moistens mortal springs with her tears." Which god corresponds to which root was a matter of debate already in antiquity; see Diog. Laert. 8.76 < A1/R91, A33/R90–92; Picot 2000; and Picot 2022, 419–95, 497–533. So too Aphrodite, Kupris, Philotēs, Philia, Gēthosunē, Storgē, and Harmonia are used synonymously. On Empedocles's polyonomy, see Bollack 1965, 287–88, 292–93.

77. Cf. P. Strasb. a(ii) 15–16/D73.285–86: "In just this way all these things were running through each other and, having wandered off, each reached different places." See Bollack (1965, 322–23) on the repetition of these lines: "Les vers qui relient si étroitement l'Être et le Devenir reproduisent, dans leurs modifications successives, l'acte même de la vie" (323). On Empedocles's repetitions, see further Van Groningen 1960, 201–22; Hershbell 1968; Graham 1988; Rosenfeld-Löffler 2006, 144–58; and Gheerbrant 2017, 493–592, 819–24.

78. This is the construction Deleuze and Guattari (1983b, 5) call the "connective synthesis of production." Other examples of polysyndeton occur at P. Strasb. a(i) 8–a(ii) 2/D73.269–272, P. Strasb. b 3–5/D74.4–6, B21.9/D77a.9, B67/D158, B76/D74, B90/D68, B121/D24, B122/D21, B123/D22, B128.4–7/D25.4–7, B130/D26, B146/D39. Cf. polysyndetic negation (*oute . . . oute . . . oute*) at B2.7–8/D42.7–8, B26.10–12/D77b.10–12, B29.1–2/D92.1–2, B128.1–2/D25.1–2, B134.1–3/D93.1–3; and alternatives (*ē . . . ē . . . ē*) at B9.2–3/D54.2–3, and the paratactic structure of B111/D43. Another of Empedocles's preferred syntactical constructions is the comparative clause with coordinating conjunctions, his countless variations on "as X . . . so Y": e.g., *tēi . . . hopēi* (B12.3/D48.3); *ophra . . . tophra* (B15.2–3/D52.2–3); *tote men*

diction reinforces this dynamic weave: thus, as we saw, trees "lay eggs" (B79/D254) and have "beautiful hair" (B127/D36), while humans and animals blossom like plants (B21.10–12/D77a.10–12). Arms are "branches" that "sprout" from the back (B29.1/D92.1, B134.2/D93.2); ears are "a sprig of flesh" (B99/D226); men and women come into being as "nocturnal saplings drawn up by fire" (B62.2/D157.2).[79] Transforming and being transformed in an exuberant polysyndetic proliferation, language is not an imitation or representation of life; it simply *is* the linguistic texture of life.

Empedocles thus creates a radical poetic style to express his radical vision of the world. This vision displaces the autopoietic *autos* of autobiography and mires the self and its *graphē* in the symbiotic, sympoietic meshwork of *bios*. But the attempt to capture this vital vision also exposes the limits of such a project, for the very language Empedocles uses to express his dispersed ontology reinscribes the presence of the authorial *autos*. The striking images of the last paragraph remind us that Empedocles's language is not a transparent window on the cosmos but the highly wrought aesthetic product of the poet. "'I' is inelim-inable," and around it Empedocles's materialist ontology of language comes into tension with itself. On one side words are things, joined at the roots; on the other they are artistic metaphors for things.

This tension accounts for much of the excitement (and frustration) of reading Empedocles's poetry. In every word and phrase, his language oscillates between the literal and the metaphoric, between materiality and mimesis. For Nietzsche it is language's metaphoric nature that sets it apart from and against life: the lin-guistic concept of a leaf is merely the (dead and deadening) image of the thing itself. But Empedocles's metaphors remain so rooted in matter that it can be dif-ficult to say whether they are metaphors at all. When we read in the programmatic fragment B2/D42 "narrow are the *palamai* poured through the limbs" (*steinōpoi men gar palamai kata guia kekhuntai*, B2.1/D42.1), is the word *palamē* metaphoric (device, art, resource) or concrete (palm of the hand)?[80] At first glance the intel-lectual context, as well as the liquid action, would seem to require a figurative

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. . . *tote de* (B17.1–2, 16–17/D73.233–234, 247–248); *allote men . . . allote de* (B17.7–8/D73.239–240; cf. B20.2–4/D73.303–305, B26.5–6/D77b.5–6); *hēi . . . tautēi* (B17.12–13/D73.243–244; cf. B26.8–12/D77b8–12); *touto men . . . touto de* (P. Strasb. a(ii) 26–27/D73.296–297); *hoson . . . toson* (B35.12/D75.12; cf. B71.4/D61.4, B108/D244a); *tēi men . . . tēi de* (B61.3–4/D156.3–4); *hōs d'hote . . . hōs de tote* (B84.1–7/D215.1–7; cf. B73/D199). This construction connects two items without giving one causal or explanatory priority over the other: instead, it ranges them along a flat plain of equivalence in which the two communicate as heterogeneous equals. We will return to the affordances of a horizontal syntax in chapter 4.

79. For very different interpretations of these images, see Rosenfeld-Löffler 2006, 14–25; Bollack 1965, 295–302; and Picot 1998, 2022, 337–75.

80. The same questions can be asked of B3.9/D44.9 ("look with every *palamē*") and B75.2/D200.2 ("in the *palamai* of Kupris"). Lloyd (1995, 172–214) questions the general validity of the distinction be-tween literal and metaphoric before Aristotle's polemical application of the dichotomy. As I observe in chapter 1, n. 3, the categories remain heuristically useful for interpreting archaic poetry.

reading, and so most translators render it. But if sense perception is the literal confluence of elements outside the body with those inside, then the senses are not merely like palms: they functionally *are* palms. Aristotle criticized Empedocles for calling the sea "the sweat of the earth" (B55/D147a), "for in speaking in this way he has perhaps spoken sufficiently for poetry (since metaphor is a poetic device) but not sufficiently for understanding nature."[81] But is this unequivocally a metaphor? Many things that at first seem like mere metaphors turn out, once we understand the theory more fully, to be literal. The "seas of blood" (B105/D240) that wash around the human heart may seem figurative until we realize that blood is literally composed of elements, "earth . . . and Hephaistus and rainstorm and all-shining aether anchored in the perfect harbors of Aphrodite" (B98.1–3/D190.1–3).[82] If in the wild symbiogenesis of Empedocles's cosmos "the same things become hairs and leaves and the thick wings of birds and scales on stout limbs" (B82/D198), then the earth can literally sweat sea.

Thus at every moment the reader must decide between matter and mimesis: is Empedocles's language a part of life or an imitation of it? When Empedocles speaks of Aphrodite's "loving pegs" (*gomphois . . . katastorgois*, B87/D214), is the phrase a daring transfer of epithet that highlights the artistry of a poet who we will soon see compare his own creative production to the work of Aphrodite? Or is it a literal enactment of Aphrodite's influence on matter, as the adjective is "attracted" to the noun?[83] B61/D156 describes the hybrid creatures produced under the waxing influence of Love:

> πολλὰ μὲν ἀμφιπρόσωπα καὶ ἀμφίστερνα φύεσθαι,
> βουγενῆ ἀνδρόπρωιρα, τὰ δ' ἔμπαλιν ἐξανατέλλειν
> ἀνδροφυῆ βούκρανα. (B61.1–3/D156.1–3)

> many things grew double-faced and double-chested,
> cow-race man-faced, and again they sprung up
> man-natured, cow-headed.

The language seems designed for mimetic effect: the monstrous compound adjectives, with their neologistic mixing and matching of species and body parts, reproduce on the level of language the phenomena that language denotes. If words are

material things, however, then they, like all other things, are subject to the combinatory force of Philotēs. "Cow," "man," "face," "chest," "race," "nature": these words wander just like the errant body parts, searching for what Simplicius calls, in quoting the fragment, "their own proper *logos*."[84]

The attempt to write a root language thus produces a schizophrenic poetics, in which language hovers undecidably between metaphor and matter. It also produces a schizophrenic poet, who himself stands in an undecidable relation to both his writing and his philosophy. On the one hand, the authorial *autos* is a divine demiurge. B23/D60 compares the creation of phenomena through the mixing of elements to artists mixing paints to produce "forms resembling all things" (*eidea pasin alinkia*, 5). The painters "mixing [the colors] in harmony" (*harmoniēi meixante*, 4) are figures for Aphrodite, herself depicted as an artisan (B86/D213, B87/D214) as she "harmonizes" the elements (*sunarmosthent'*, B71.4/D61.4; cf. B27.3/D89.3, B96.4/D192.4, B107/D241), but also for the poet himself. Emphatically identified as men (*aneres*, 2), these artisans are characterized by their cleverness and learning (*mētios eu dedaōte*, 2), vocabulary used elsewhere for the poet's teaching (B2.9/D42.9, B17.25/D73.256), and their many-colored "potions" (*polukhroa pharmaka*, 3) anticipate the "cures for evils" that will be one benefit of that teaching (*pharmaka . . . kakōn*, B111.1/D43.1). This double analogy, with its overt diction of mimesis, equates the poet with Aphrodite and his poetic "forms" with the phenomena she creates—"trees and men and women and beasts and birds and water-nurtured fish and long-lived gods highest in honors" (6–8). It simultaneously analogizes his poetic production to cosmogonic creation and posits it as a meta-creation through its self-referentially mimetic language.[85] It is little surprise, then, that the fragment ends by declaring this demiurge a god: "Know these things clearly, having heard a speech from a god" (*theou para muthon akousas*, 11). On the other hand, however, if that authorial god is the source of creation he is also one of its creatures, for "long-lived gods" are among the "forms resembling all things" the artist men (*aneres*) produce—as, for that matter, are men (*aneras*, 6). Even as he lifts himself above the world to paint it, the author-as-demiurge is shadowed by a daimonic double that stands within the world he paints, down among its very roots.[86]

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84. Simpl. *in Phys.* 371.33 ff. (ad B61/D152); Bollack 1969, 423. Compare B109/D207: "By earth we perceive earth, by water water, by air shining air, and by fire destructive fire, Love by love, and Strife by terrible strife." Is the repeated polyptoton here mimetic of the principle of like-to-like or do the words literally exemplify that principle? Cf. the polyptoton of forms of *allos* (B17.6–8, 28/D73.238–240, 259; B26.2–6/D77b.2–6; B35.6/D75.6; B108/D244; B115.12/D10.12).

85. On the artist as a figure for the poet, see further Bollack 1969, 122; Iribarren 2018, 178–98; and on the parallels between the poet and Love as "master carpenters," Mackenzie 2021a, 119–24. Porter (2025) emphasizes the creative force of Strife. The dual painters are often taken to allude to Love and Strife.

86. Osborne (1987a, 41) notes that in the real world (as opposed to the simile) Empedocles does not ascribe the process of mixture to an agent. The antecedent of *allothen* in line 9 is unspecified; thus even this highly wrought simile leaves it unclear whether the "font of all mortal things" is the painters themselves or their paints. Perhaps we may detect some anxiety about the divine author function in the

The contradictions inherent in the attempt to enunciate his rhizomatic ontology thus split the position of enunciation, leaving the *autos* himself divided. Consider B17/D73.233–66, the single most philosophically significant fragment in *Peri Phuseōs*. In a careful reading of the opening lines, Daniel Graham shows that the cosmic symmetry the fragment describes is mirrored in its artful form. He notes a repeated pattern of couplets pairing motifs of unification and separation. Through this repetition, he argues, the couplets "not only describe the process but *imitate* it . . . . Thus B17 must be read as more than an argument or a programme for an argument: it is also a *mimetic structure* which *portrays* the world condition which it describes."[87] This masterly mimesis is the work of a masterful *egō* who declares his presence at the opening of the fragment:

> δίπλ' ἐρέω· τοτὲ μὲν γὰρ ἓν ηὐξήθη μόνον εἶναι
> ἐκ πλεόνων, τοτὲ δ' αὖ διέφυ πλέον' ἐξ ἑνὸς εἶναι.
> δοιὴ δὲ θνητῶν γένεσις, δοιὴ δ' ἀπόλειψις. (B17.1–3/D73.233–35)

> I will speak double. For at one time they augmented to be one alone
> out of many, at another time they diverged again to be many from one.
> Double is the creation of mortal things, double their failing.

The poet self-consciously promises to reproduce the world in his words. *Dipla* characterizes both the content of this account, the double cycle from many to one and from one to many, and its form, with each clause starting with coordinated temporal adverbs (*tote men . . . tote de*) and ending with the verb "to be" (*einai*). That double process is repeated in the dual birth, dual death of mortal things (*doiē de . . . doiē de*). This doubling is in turn doubled when the first two lines are repeated verbatim a dozen lines later (16–17/247–48): "I will speak double. . . ." The poetic *egō* lays forceful claim to his own speech by drawing attention to its mimetic artistry.

But that artistry does not secure the poet as the singular origin of his discourse, for in the very process of describing it, the *egō* is itself doubled and redoubled. The future tense *ereō* in line 1 divides the first person between the present moment in which he is promising to speak and the future moment in which he will speak. To this present and future *egō* is added a third who looks back on them even as he himself fragments into past, present, and future:

> ἀλλ' ἄγε μύθων κλῦθι· μάθη γάρ τοι φρένας αὔξει·
> ὡς γὰρ καὶ πρὶν ἔειπα πιφαύσκων πείρατα μύθων,
> δίπλ' ἐρέω. (B17.14–16/D73.245–47)

> But come, listen to my words, for learning will augment your mind.
> For as I said before, declaring the bounds of my words,
> I will speak double.

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adjective *aspeta* ("unspeakable"), which marks a limit to the reach of language, and the "uncharacteristically stilted" (Wright 1981, 180) arrangement of line 10, on which see Diels-Kranz ad loc: "schlechter Vers!"

87. Graham 1988, 305–6 (original emphasis); cf. Reinhardt 1959, 51–55.

The poetic voice divided in time is also divided in space, split between the first person who speaks and the second person who listens: the words (*muthōn*) of the former are effectuated as the learning (*mathē*) that augments (*auxei*) the mind of the latter (14/245). That process in turn repeats the action of the elements as they "learned to grow into one from many" (*memathēke*, 9/240a) and were "augmented (*ēuxēthē*) to be one alone from many" (1, 16/233, 247).[88] In this passage, the *autos* raises himself above *bios* in order to re-present it through the mimetic artistry of his *graphē*. But that *graphē* does not maintain its mimetic distance from *bios*, and both it and its author are drawn back down into the transformative rush of things. In the process the poetic *autos* himself oscillates. Empedocles loses his glorious stability: simultaneously outside of and immersed in his own ontology, he has no *empedos aiōn*.

Finally, this schism in the authorial *autos* produces a schizophrenic philosophy. B110/D257 details the effects of Empedocles's teaching and probably came near the end of *Peri Phuseōs*.[89]

> εἰ γάρ κέν σφ' ἀδινῆισιν ὑπὸ πραπίδεσσιν ἐρείσας
> εὐμενέως καθαρῆισιν ἐποπτεύσηις μελέτηισιν,
> ταῦτά τέ σοι μάλα πάντα δι' αἰῶνος παρέσονται,
> ἄλλα τε πόλλ' ἀπὸ τῶνδ' ἐκτήσεαι· αὐτὰ γὰρ αὔξει
> ταῦτ' εἰς ἦθος ἕκαστον, ὅπη φύσις ἐστὶν ἑκάστωι.
> εἰ δὲ σύ γ' ἀλλοίων ἐπορέξεαι, οἷα κατ' ἄνδρας
> μυρία δειλὰ πέλονται ἅ τ' ἀμβλύνουσι μερίμνας,
> ἦ σ' ἄφαρ ἐκλείψουσι περιπλομένοιο χρόνοιο
> σφῶν αὐτῶν ποθέοντα φίλην ἐπὶ γένναν ἱκέσθαι·
> πάντα γὰρ ἴσθι φρόνησιν ἔχειν καὶ νώματος αἶσαν. (B110/D257)

For if, pressing them under your dense thought organs,
you keep kindly watch on them with pure practices,
all these things will be present for you throughout your lifetime
and you will acquire many other things from these. For they themselves augment
into each character (*ēthos*), according to the nature (*phusis*) of each.[90]

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88. Line 9, missing from the citations and supplied by Diels on the basis of the parallel with B26.8/D77b.8, is generally accepted.

89. All editors place B110/D257 at or near the end of the poem except Inwood (2001), who locates it in the preamble to the single poem.

90. The sense of this line is contested. *Auxanō* is usually transitive in the active in this period, and some take *hekaston* as its object. This yields a proto-Aristotelian process in which teachings actualize the potential, or *phusis,* of each thing into its final *ēthos.* But it seems to me more natural to take *hekaston* with *ēthos,* and to take *auxei* as intransitive (as it often is in later Greek): it would not be the only time that Empedocles supplies our earliest attestation of a word or usage. Compare Inwood (2001, 219): "For these things themselves will expand to form each character." See further the discussion by Long (1966, 269–70): if he is correct that *auta taut'* refers to external elements and *hekaston* to the internal, then the difference between a transitive and intransitive reading of the verb is not so great.

> But if you reach for a different sort, such as those wretched thousands
> that are among men and that blunt their thoughts,
> then in truth they will quickly abandon you, as time cycles around,
> desiring to come to their own dear (*philēn*) race.
> For know (*isthi*) that all things have thought and a share of mind.

The conditional structure of the fragment and its initiatory diction place emphasis on the student's ethical agency: he must choose which path to take and will reap the consequences.[91] The fragment thus appears to be the first chapter in the autobiography of a philosophical *autos*: the student who chooses to follow Empedocles's teaching and thereby gains (*ektēseai*) knowledge that will last throughout his lifetime (*di' aiōnos*) is taking the first step in a journey that will culminate in the extraordinary wisdom of the man described in B129/D38 who possessed (*ektēsato*) such a wealth of learning that it filled "ten or twenty lifetimes" (*aiōnessin*).

The young philosopher stands like Heracles at the crossroads. But instead of a spiritual *askēsis*, his intellectual adventure will enact Empedoclean physics. For if the student presses Empedocles's teachings into his thought organs, they press back. The agency of the thinker (in the protasis of each conditional sentence) is matched by the actancy of the thoughts (in the apodoseis). Thoughts move and grow, pursuing their own line of flight. If accepted hospitably, they will stay with the student throughout his life (or maybe their own, *di' aiōnos*, 3). There they will increase, an expansion that will benefit the student but also themselves. Like the roots, thoughts grow and change through their interconnections with other things.[92] The student's mind is one such thing. His thick diaphragm (*prapidessin*) provides a convenient abode for this growth: *ēthos* means disposition or character (in reference to the ethical student-initiate) but also a haunt or habitual

91. Cf. B111.5/D43.5 *ēn ethelēistha* and similar conditional constructions in B2/D42, B3/D44. I follow Diels (in his translation) in understanding the antecedent of *sphe* in the first line as "die Lehren des Meisters," and not the elements (as Schwabl 1956 does; cf. Bollack 1969, 577–85), but as Long (1966, 269) comments, "for this context, as for every other, thoughts and elements are one and the same entity." The verb *epopteuein* is initiatory. The "positive attitude" (*eumeneōs*) and "pure practices" (*kathārēisin meletēisin*) also evoke initiation: see Bollack 1969, 578–79; and on Empedocles's mystic language more broadly, Traglia 1952, 161–86. The "you" addressed here is presumably Pausanias.

92. In B106/D243 we hear that human cleverness (*mētis*) will increase (*aexetai*) in relation to what is near it. That fragment probably imagines the thoughts within us encountering the world outside us (as in B109/D207, where our internal earth, water, and fire allow us to see those elements in the phenomenal world). B110/D257 reverses the perspective, showing thought in the outer world encountering and growing through its encounter with the inner world. *Auxanō* is used of the roots at B17.1, 16/D73.233, 247, B26.2/D77b.2; cf. B37/D67. Multiple verbal parallels link the words/thoughts of B110/D257 to the elements: e.g. *periplomenoio khronoio* (8) is used of the elements' cycling at B17.29/D73.260 and B26.1/D77b.1; *aisa* (10) is used at B26.2/D77b.2 of the alternating cycle of unification and dispersal; and *aiōn* (3) for the changeable life span of the elements (B17.11/D73.242, B26.10/D77b.10). Cf. B17.9/D73.240a, B26.8/D77b.8: the elements "learned to grow into one from many."

abode (from the perspective of the incubating knowledge).[93] Likewise, in the next clause, *phusis* is simultaneously the student's ethical "nature" and the thoughts' self-generating "growth."

Two independent lines of motion thus intersect in the mutually augmenting encounter of mind and words. If that encounter is hostile, Empedocles's teachings will continue along their way, pursuing their "desire to come to their own dear race." We saw that Empedocles's daimonic autobiography is structured as a story of exile and reintegration, capped with the joyful greeting to his *philoi* in B112/D4. His words have their own *nostos* saga: they too suffer nostalgia and long to return to their *philoi*. Each of them is itself a self (*auta . . . tauta*, B110.4–5/D257.4–5) with its own journey and its own story to tell: "I was once already. . . ."

This shared experience of travels and homecoming motivates the final line. "For know that all things have thought and a share of mind" (cf. B103/D242). Taken out of context this line seems to assert the kinship of all living things, the "law of all things" (B135/D27a) that makes eating animals an act of murder and cannibalism (B137/D29, B136/D28, B128/D25). But the idea is more radical than that. The causal connection (*gar*) between lines 9 and 10 suggests that the "all things" that have thought include thoughts themselves, as they go about seeking a congenial abode, journeying to reach their longed-for home, augmenting themselves. Thought is not a possession of the student, the profit of his ethical agency. Instead, it is a sympoietic coproduction of word and mind, as each pursues its own trajectory "bent upon the tasks of life."[94] This generous understanding of *phronēsis* breaks down the division between matter and thought, thing and concept. Thought is a thing, and like all things, it has thought.

The familiar imperative *isthi*—"know!"—reminds us of the pedagogical *egō* who throughout this poem asserts himself as the origin of philosophical teaching and knowledge. This fragment sidelines that philosophical *egō*. In place of a predictable path starting from the *autos* and proceeding via his *graphē* to the goal of wisdom, we find *egō* and *graphē* working autonomously for themselves and reciprocally on one another. Philosophy is the happy side effect of their fortuitous intersection. Thought, unmoored from the self, takes on a life of its own. It authors itself. It's worth remembering that the English word "author" is derived not from *autos*, but from *augere*, "to increase." In Empedocles, things increase by "running through" other things; they author themselves in a mutually augmenting sympoiesis. The author himself is not above this process, secure (*empedos*) in his autopoietic glory (*kleos*), but simply some thing among "all things" as they rush and collide and change. And *sophia*, finally, is not the product of the authoritative

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93. The latter meaning occurs more commonly in the plural, but the singular would not be such a stretch for Empedocles. Kingsley (2002, 400–404) takes *prapidessi* as an esoteric reference to shamanic breathing practices.

94. Ingold 2011, 6. In this fragment, in particular, Empedocles heeds Ingold's (Nietzschean) call: "Knowing must be reconnected with being, epistemology with ontology, thought with life" (75).

autos, an object he creates like a divine demiurge and gives as a gift to his dedicated student. Rather it is an emergent property of the assemblage of moving parts that constitutes *bios*. Philosophy does not master life from above; it wells up in its midst, in the grass of "things and words." This is Empedocles's radical philosophy, a root philosophy in every sense.

The final line of B110/D257—"know that all things have thought and a share of mind"—encapsulates the tensions inherent in that radical philosophical project. The attempt to write this rhizomatic ontology sets the authorial *autos* ("know!") in tension with the world he authors, a world that displaces his authority and authorship. This tension renders the philosophical *autos* himself incoherent, split between the subject and object of his own *graphē*: the enduring *egō* who recounts the story of his life—"I was once already a boy and a girl . . ."—cannot be reconciled with the provisional, unstable being who lives this life nor with the life itself, a life in which every being has such a story to tell. This incoherence in turn ensures that Empedocles's own demiurgic "I"—the "I" that commands us to listen to his poem and learn its philosophy and guarantees the veracity and value of both— will always be shadowed by a daimonic double. That daimonic *egō* is precisely the *autos* we have seen emerge within Empedocles's ontology, one of the myriad heterogeneous *auta tauta* that run through and transform *allēla*. In Empedocles's philosophical discourse, the "I" is both impossible and ineliminable. Fixing the rush of life around a stable self-same subject, the *empedos autos*, it risks petrifying his mobile metaphysics. Empedocles resists such petrification, even if he cannot fully escape it. His schizophrenic autobiography is the symptom of this effort.[95]

95. The oscillation between stability and instability in Empedocles's name is echoed in the well-known biographical tradition concerning his death: ancient sources report that he leapt into Aetna either to confirm his identity as a god (Diog. Laert. 8.67–69, 70) or to dissolve himself in the elements (Tzetzes, quoted by Inwood [2001, 82]). Both gestures are self-defeating, for if the act was meant to prove him immortal it proved him mortal, and if it was meant to disperse his person it also fixed it as a myth. Either way, in this act Empedocles writes a fittingly ambivalent final chapter to his autobiography.