

demand of those who do not count to be taken into account.⁴⁴ But such a politically generative miscount is impossible in Anaxagoras's cosmology because the difference between many and all—between “many things in all things” (*en pasi de polla*, B6/D25; cf. B12.25/D27) and “everything in everything” (*en panti panta*, B6/D25)—is literally immeasurable.⁴⁵

Without ipseity, then, the political possibilities implicit in Anaxagoras's initial state cannot be developed or, in his idiom, become manifest (*endēlon*). In B1/D9, for example, we hear that air and aether “held down (*kateikhen*) all things, both being unbounded, for these things are greatest (*megista*) among all things, both in amount (*plēthei*) and magnitude (*megethei*).” *Kateikhein* can mean simply to cover or contain, but it can also connote domination or mastery, suggesting a proto-organization, even a proto-politics; in classical Greek the verb is used of a superior power seizing and occupying a domain.⁴⁶ But in the mixture of everything in everything, air and aether are only “semi-emergent,” and their potential domination over the things remains unrealized.⁴⁷ Nor can the egalitarian potential of the relations between the things be realized, as I have suggested, for if “all things have a share of everything,” then there can be no “part with no part” whose demand for inclusion initiates politics. If everything is both a part of and a whole for every other thing, there can be no representation (part for whole) or participation (part of a whole). Moreover, the *summixis* of everything in everything eliminates not just ipseity, but also alterity and with it the overt and contestable relations that are the basis of the polis. A being-*in* rather than being-*with*, the originary state of “all things together” remains a confused collocation, not a real political community. It is a virtual distribution of the perceptible, but one that cannot actually become manifest, *endēlon*.

NOUS AUTOKRATES

Everything changes with the arrival of Nous. Nous marks a rupture in the space-time of the cosmos and an exception to its fundamental laws. He inaugurates a new distribution of the sensible.⁴⁸ The key text is fragment B12/D27.

44. Rancière 1999, 6, 10. Rancière begins with Arist. *Pol.* 7.4 1326a, where the first question of political theory is the number and nature of the *plēthos*. On politics and/as enumeration, see further Derrida 1997, esp. 1–25, 101–2.

45. Rancière (1999, 10) takes a similar conflation of many and all—“for all things are in the many” (*en gar tōi pollōi eni ta panta*), Otanes's formula for democracy at Hdt. 3.80.6—as paradigmatic of “the fundamental miscount of politics.”

46. E.g. Hdt. 5.15, 5.45, 5.72; Thuc. 4.2.4, 4.92.6, 4.110.1, 6.23.2; cf. Hdt. 5.91 for domination by a tyrant. At Thuc. 2.65.8 Pericles is said to have restrained (*kateikhe*) the majority (*plēthos*).

47. “Semi-emergent” is Curd's (2007, 35) description. Inwood (1986, 26–27) suggests that air and aether are only virtually present, in the sense that the elements to constitute them are present: cf. n. 70 below.

48. I refer to Nous as “he” because the noun is masculine and is defined (with a few exceptions discussed below) by masculine adjectives and relative pronouns. I capitalize the word to highlight Nous's

[1] τὰ μὲν ἄλλα παντὸς μοῖραν μετέχει, νοῦς δὲ ἐστὶν ἄπειρον καὶ αὐτοκρατὲς καὶ μέμικται οὐδενὶ χρήματι, ἀλλὰ μόνος αὐτὸς ἐπ' ἑωυτοῦ ἐστίν. εἰ μὴ γὰρ ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ ἦν, ἀλλὰ τειω ἐμέμικτο ἄλλωι, μετεῖχεν ἂν ἀπάντων χρημάτων, [5] εἰ ἐμέμικτό τειω· ἐν παντὶ γὰρ παντὸς μοῖρα ἔνεστιν, ὥσπερ ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεν μοι λέλεκται· καὶ ἂν ἐκώλυνεν αὐτὸν τὰ συμμεμειγμένα, ὥστε μηδενὸς χρήματος κρατεῖν ὁμοίως ὡς καὶ μόνον ἐόντα ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ. ἔστι γὰρ λεπτότατόν τε πάντων χρημάτων καὶ [10] καθαρώτατον, καὶ γνώμην γε περὶ παντὸς πᾶσαν ἴσχει καὶ ἰσχύει μέγιστον· καὶ ὅσα γε ψυχὴν ἔχει καὶ τὰ μείζω καὶ τὰ ἐλάσσω, πάντων νοῦς κρατεῖ. καὶ τῆς περιχωρήσιος τῆς συμπάσης νοῦς ἐκράτησεν, ὥστε περιχωρῆσαι τὴν ἀρχήν. καὶ πρῶτον ἀπὸ τοῦ σμικροῦ ἤρξατο περιχωρεῖν, ἐπὶ δὲ πλέον [15] περιχωρεῖ, καὶ περιχωρήσει ἐπὶ πλέον. καὶ τὰ συμμισγόμενά τε καὶ ἀποκρινόμενα καὶ διακρινόμενα πάντα ἔγνω νοῦς. καὶ ὅποια ἔμελλεν ἔσεσθαι καὶ ὅποια ἦν, ἅσσα νῦν μὴ ἔστι, καὶ ὅσα νῦν ἐστί καὶ ὅποια ἔσται, πάντα διεκόσμησε νοῦς, καὶ τὴν περιχώρησιν ταύτην, ἣν νῦν [20] περιχωρεῖ ταῖς ἀστροῖς καὶ ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ἡ σελήνη καὶ ὁ αἶθρ καὶ ὁ αἰθήρ οἱ ἀποκρινόμενοι. ἡ δὲ περιχώρησις αὐτῇ ἐποίησεν ἀποκρίνεσθαι. καὶ ἀποκρίνεται ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀραιοῦ τὸ πυκνὸν καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ ψυχροῦ τὸ θερμὸν καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ ζοφεροῦ τὸ λαμπρὸν καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ διεροῦ τὸ [25] ξηρόν. μοῖραι δὲ πολλαὶ πολλῶν εἰσι. παντάπασι δὲ οὐδὲν ἀποκρίνεται οὐδὲ διακρίνεται ἕτερον ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐτέρου πλην νοῦ. νοῦς δὲ πᾶς ὁμοίος ἐστί καὶ ὁ μείζων καὶ ὁ ἐλάττω. ἕτερον δὲ οὐδὲν ἐστὶν ὁμοιον οὐδενί, ἀλλ' ὅταν πλείεστα ἔνι, ταῦτα ἐνδηλότατα ἐν ἑκαστόν [30] ἐστί καὶ ἦν.

[1] The other things have a share of everything, but Nous is unbounded and *autokrates* and has been mixed with no thing, but he is alone himself by himself. For if he were not by himself, but had been mixed with something else, he would have a share of all things, [5] if he had been mixed with anything; for there is a share of everything in everything, as I have said before. And the things that were mixed together would prevent him from controlling any thing in the same way as he does being alone by himself. For he is lightest and [10] purest of all things and he holds all knowledge about everything and has the greatest strength. And however many things have soul, both the greater and the lesser, Nous controls all of these. And Nous controlled the whole rotation so that it rotated to begin with. First it began to revolve from the small, then [15] it revolves more, and it will revolve even more. The things that are mixed together and the things that are separated off and becoming distinct, Nous knew them all. And whatever sorts of things were going to be, and whatever sorts were that now are not, and however many are now and whatever sorts will be, all these things Nous set in order, and the rotation, in which now [20] revolve the things being separated off: the stars and the sun and the moon and the air and the aether. The rotation itself created separation. And the dense is separated from the rare and the hot from the cold and the bright from the dark and the [25] dry from the wet. There are many shares of many things. And nothing is separating off entirely nor becoming distinct, one from another, except Nous. Nous is entirely the same, both the greater and the lesser. But no other thing is similar to anything else, but whatever things predominate in something, these things are most manifestly what each thing [30] is and was.

singularity, in contrast to the anonymous collective things. Line numbers in the quotation, added for ease of reference, are based on Diels-Kranz's layout. Laks-Most do not provide line numbers for their D27.

With the appearance of *Nous*, the world starts anew. We read in line 13: “*Nous* controlled (*ekratēsen*) the entire rotation so that it rotated to begin with (*tēn arkhēn*).”⁴⁹ *Nous* initiates a new *arkhē*, at once a new first element and a new ruling principle. This new *arkhē* introduces chronology into Anaxagoras’s cosmology and allows us to see that the initial state of the *khremata* is a bygone era. The imperfects of *homou panta khremata ēn* and throughout the fragments we have been considering seemed on first reading like imperfects of description. But with *Nous*’s new beginning we can see in retrospect that they actually mark a past tense defined in relation to the now of *Nous*. So time starts over, or perhaps for the first time, since without a mechanism of change the initial state could have no time. *Nous* introduces historical tense—he controlled (*ekratēsen*, 13), he came to know (*egnō*, 16), he ordered (*diekosmēse*, 18)—and sets time in motion. Himself eternal (*aei esti*, B14/D28), he orders a continuous sequence of past, present, and future: “And whatever sorts of things were going to be (*emellen esesthai*), and whatever sorts were (*ēn*) that now are (*esti*) not, and however many are (*esti*) now and whatever sorts will be (*estai*), all these things *Nous* set in order” (17–19).⁵⁰

Nous’s temporal rupture accompanies a spatial rupture. *Nous* comes out of nowhere—literally: Anaxagoras’s universe is a plenum and it was already full up with “everything” before *Nous* arrived on the scene.⁵¹ *Nous* thus appears as a supplement to everything; he is supernumerary and emphatically separate. We are told repeatedly that nothing can exist apart (*khōris*, B6/D25, B8/D22, cf. B12.26–28/D27), but *Nous* does. He is thus nowhere but also everywhere, all-pervasive in space as he is in time: “*Nous*, who is always, is most certainly even now where (*hina*) all the other things are, in (*en*) the surrounding magnitude and in (*en*) the things joined together and in (*en*) the things separated off” (B14/D28). We will return below to the question of what it means for *Nous* to be “in” everything, but it is clear that he is not in everything in the same way as everything else is in everything. He shares the things’ space but not their collective being, for “there is a share of everything in everything except *Nous*” (B11/D26). *Nous* thus introduces a double spatial rupture, a rift not only in the original spatial disposition of the things (everything in everything) but in the very logic of space (the meaning of “in”).⁵²

49. Cf. B13/D29b: “and when *Nous* began (*ērxato*) to move things”; Arist. *De an.* 1.2 405a15 (< A55/R13): “Anaxagoras makes *Nous* especially the *arkhē* of all things.”

50. Note also the insistence on temporal sequence at lines 13–15: after he imposed the *arkhē*, the rotation “began to revolve (*ērxato perikhōrein*) from the small, then it revolves (*perikhōrei*) more, and it will revolve (*perikhōrēsei*) even more.”

51. Lucr. 1.843–44 (= A44/R29); Arist. *Cael.* 4.2 309a19–20, *Ph.* 4.6 213a22–24 (= A68/D59–60); Hippol. *Haer.* 1.8.3 (= A42/D4); Curd 2008, 233.

52. *Nous*’s ubiquity raises the question of his materiality and corporeality, questions on which there is no consensus: see Lanza 1966, 222–24; Renehan 1980, 115–16; and Curd 2007, 200–4. Although he lacks the corporeal features of Xenophanes’s *theos* (Xen. B23–26/D16–19), *Nous* does seem to occupy space. Later commentators like Simplicius (ad B14/D28) make Anaxagoras a dualist; so too, Sedley

Nous's arrival ruptures not only the original space-time of the cosmos but also its basic ontology. Nous is ontologically distinct from the *khrēmata* and an exception to the rules they live by. B12/D27 begins: "The other things have a share of everything, but Nous is unbounded and *autokrates* and has been mixed with no thing but he is alone himself by himself." The *men/de* construction sets Nous against the "other things" that used to be everything. Boundless like the things (*apeiron*, cf. B1/D9), he is, however, not one of them. Indeed, despite being "lightest and purest of all things" (a description to which we will return), Nous has a fundamentally different constitution from the things, as the end of the fragment explains. While everything else is radically heterogeneous, both externally (because no thing is like anything else) and internally (since everything contains a share of everything), Nous is only and entirely himself: "Nous is entirely the same" (*nous de pas homoios esti*, B12.27–28/D27). Unitary, singular, and homogenous, an exception to the basic laws of the universe, Nous is no-thing.

Nous's exceptional nature is the source of his exceptional power. He is *autokrates* (B12.2/D27): he rules by himself and for himself. *Autokrates* is a strong word. It appears nowhere before Anaxagoras and his usage seems to have been memorable. Plato recalls it when paraphrasing Anaxagoras in the *Cratylus* (413c). In classical Greek it denotes persons vested with the full legitimate authority of the polis; it is frequently used for plenipotentiary embassies.⁵³ It is also used of tyrants and other absolute rulers. Authorized by and answering to no political community, solitary and solipsistic, Nous is a cosmic tyrant. His *kratos* is autotelic: it derives from itself, inheres in itself, and refers only to itself. It is its own *arkhē*—its own ground or legitimation—and its own *telos*. Nous *autokrates* thus exemplifies the absolute and unconditional sovereignty that Derrida terms ipsocratic. Carl Schmitt famously defines the sovereign as "he who decides on the state of exception."⁵⁴ Anaxagoras's Nous is a literal exception, for as B11/D26 says, "there is a share of everything in everything except Nous" (*plēn nou*, cf. B12.27/D27). No wonder that later readers considered Nous a god (A48/P34).⁵⁵

2008b, 8–25. It is worth noting that some scholars view the basic elements as immaterial, e.g. Furth 1991; and Marmodoro 2017, 17–24.

53. For generals, ambassadors: Andoc. *De myst.* 15, *De pace*, 6, 33, 34, 39; Ar. *Av.* 1595, *Lys.* 1010, *Pax* 359; *Lys.* 13.9. Of absolute rulers or magistrates with unlimited power: Thuc. 1.126, 6.72; Xen. *An.* 6.1.21; Pl. *Leg.* 875b, *Plt.* 299c; Dem. 18.235; Arist. *Pol.* 3.9 1285a8, 4.8 1295a12.

54. Schmitt 2005 (translation modified). As a violent suspension of the existing order, Schmitt's sovereign raises a political version of the Eleatic problem: "Looked at normatively, the decision emerges from nothingness" (31). Derrida (1992b) offers a meditation on this paradox. Cf. Agamben (2005), stressing the state of exception as a domain of lawlessness within the law.

55. Menn (1995) examines the concept of god as *nous*; as Porter (2016, 547–54) observes, in early Greek philosophy, matter at its most sublime gives way to the divine. See also Derrida (2009, 46–54) on the concealed "ontotheological" basis of sovereignty (barely concealed in Schmitt's treatment).

Mind's sovereignty both emerges from and eventuates in a new distribution of the sensible, a distribution at once physical, metaphysical, and political. Nous is *autokrates* because he is unmixed with the elements, as Anaxagoras explains in B12.1–8/D27: he dominates because he is separate. He also dominates through separation. His very presence introduces new divisions in the universe of the *khremata*. B11/D26 continues: "There is a share of everything in (*en . . . enesti*) everything except Nous, but there are things that Nous is also in (*eni*).⁵⁶" What it means for Nous to be "in" some things is debated, but commentators agree that the *eni* at the end of the sentence describes a different relation from the *enesti* in the first part, since it is nonreciprocal: Nous can be in some things but they cannot be in him. Now things are distinguished not only by the relative differences of color, shape, and size, but also by the apparently absolute difference of the presence or absence of Nous. The special things that contain Nous are presumably the same ones described in B12.11/D27 as "however many things have *psukhē*, both the greater and the lesser" and glossed in B4a/D13 as "humans and all other living things that have *psukhē*." Anaxagoras doesn't say whether this new division is hierarchical, but as a differential intimacy with the source of power it seems that it must be.⁵⁶ Nous thus reapportions the perceptible into a new hierarchy of being.

Division is the source of Mind's power and of his knowledge. Power and knowledge are closely linked for Nous, as his name might lead us to expect. In B12.10/D27 he "holds all knowledge about everything (*gnōmēn ge peri pantos pasan iskhēi*) and has the greatest strength (*kai iskhuei megiston*).⁵⁷" The connection is reinforced by the aural repetition *iskhei/iskhuei*. Nous knows all things and dominates them by differentiating them, as B12.16–19/D27 explains: "The things that are mixed together and the things that are separated off and becoming distinct, Nous knew them all. And whatever sorts of things were going to be, and whatever sorts were that now are not, and however many are now and whatever sorts will be, all these things Nous set in order" (*diekosmēse*). This *diakosmēsis*—this ordering (*kosmos*) through division (*dia*)—is Nous's sovereign act and the fullest expression of his power/knowledge.⁵⁷ Sorting the ingredients by both quantity (*hosa*) and quality (*hopoia*), he separates (*apokrinomena*) and differentiates (*diakrinomena*) and in this way creates the universe as we know it, setting in motion the processes that will generate all the familiar phenomena of our world and all other possible worlds (B4a/D13).

Through his *diakosmēsis* Nous introduces a principle of visibility into a formerly opaque cosmos—again in keeping with his name, which was originally linked

56. As Aristotle drily notes, "It does not seem that *nous*, at least in respect to *phronēsis*, is similarly present in all animals, nor even in all human beings" (*De an.* 1.2 404b1–7 < A100/R12). He takes Anaxagoras to task for failing to differentiate *nous* and *psukhē* (*De an.* 1.2 405a13–19 < A55/R13).

57. Cf. B13/D29b's triple repetition of *diakrinō*. Laks (1993) associates Nous's *gnōmē* closely with his powers of *krisis*; contra, Lesher 1995.

to visual perception.⁵⁸ Where before there was just the undifferentiated chaos of everything in everything, a *summixis* in which no thing was manifest (*ouden endēlon ēn*, B1/D9; cf. B4b/D12), now things are separated and concentrated so that, as the last line of B12/D27 says, “whatever things predominate (*pleista*, literally, “are most”) in something, these things are most manifestly (*endēlotata*) what each thing (*hen hekaston*) is and was.” Visibility is the manifestation of discrete, numerable objects. In the original *summixis*, as we saw, it was impossible to measure the *plēthos* of elements or to count any individual element. But now one can discern which things are “most” (*pleista*) in anything and, as a result, can reckon the identity of “each one” (*hen hekaston*).⁵⁹ In one and the same moment, Nous introduces visibility, countability, and identity—in short, ipseity. In this way, as André Laks has argued, Nous remakes the things in his own image; himself an integer (“alone himself by himself,” B12.3/D27), he separates the things into discrete identities the better to know and control them.⁶⁰ This brings us back to Nous’s *auto-kratos*. The cosmos his *kratos* commands is the same (*auto*) as that *kratos* itself, a perfect ipsocentric circle.

Under the *arkhē* of Nous, Anaxagoras thus redistributes the sensible in the image of an autocratic sovereign. And yet on closer inspection it appears that Nous’s *diakosmēsis* is incomplete and both his *autos* and his *kratos* curiously limited. Plato, in fact, remarks on this. In the *Phaedo* Socrates describes his initial excitement on finding that Anaxagoras made Nous the cause of everything. He expected that “ordering mind would order all things and establish each in the best possible way” (*Phd.* 97c4–6), so that by reading the philosopher he would discover not only how things are but also why it is best that they be that way (97e). He was bitterly disappointed, then, to discover “that the man makes no use (*khrōmenon*) of Nous and provides no causes for the *diakosmēsis* of things” (98b8–c1). In other words, Nous lacks *nous*; he causes the *diakosmēsis* but does not, in Plato’s view, plan or intend it, betraying the etymology of his own name.⁶¹

Other readers wondered whether he even really caused it. Aristotle is acerbic: “Anaxagoras uses (*khrētai*) Nous as a contrivance (*mēkhanēi*) for producing cosmic order (*kosmopoian*). He drags him on when he is at a loss for an explanation

58. Von Fritz (1943, 91) describes *noos* in Homer as “a mental vision, which not only penetrates deeper but also ‘sees farther’ both in space and in time than our eyes.” He traces the evolution of the term from a sensory to a purely cognitive function (1945, 1946, with critique by Leshner [1994a, 3–10]). Compare Xenophanes’s *theos*, which likewise brings together *nous* and sense perception: as a whole he sees, knows (*noei*), hears (B24/D17).

59. Inwood 1986, 27: “Only when the separation has occurred, *now* rather than *then*, can one refer to greatness or largeness. For the separation has produced discernible, countable bodies.”

60. Laks 1993.

61. The example Plato gives highlights the noncentripetal design of Anaxagoras’s cosmic geometry: Socrates expected that if Anaxagoras said that something is in the center (*en mesōi*) he would say why it was better for it to be in the center (*Phd.* 97e). On Socrates’s critique, see Furley 1987; and on his broader engagement with Anaxagoras’s ideas, Vasiliou 2021.

for some necessity; but otherwise he attributes the cause of generation to everything but Nous.”⁶² Nous is not the architect of *kosmopoia*, but a mere device (*mēkhanē*), a *khērēma* the author uses (*khērētai*). Other ancient readers too thought Anaxagoras gives too much credit to the *perikhōrēsis*: Nous sets it in motion, but it is the mechanical rotation that actually creates the world.⁶³ In B12.13/D27, as we have seen, the inaugural act of Nous’s *kratos* (*ekratēsen*, the first occurrence of the verb in a historical tense) is to inaugurate the rotation “so that it rotated to begin with” (*tēn arkhēn*). Mind’s *kratos* is the *arkhē*. But in the next sentence the noun *arkhē* becomes a verb, *ērato*, and *perikhōrēsis* is its subject.⁶⁴ So if Nous is the *arkhē*, he shares this honor with the mindless vortex. He also shares with it some of his power. In B9/D14 we are told that things as they revolve are separated out “by force and speed (*hupo biēs te kai takhutētos*); and the speed produces force.” Traditionally, Biē stands next to Kratos as the twin attendants of Zeus and symbols of his sovereignty.⁶⁵ But here, the two are split up: Nous has *kratos*, but *biē* belongs to the centrifugal motion of vortex. It’s worth noting that in Aristophanes’s parody of Anaxagorean physics in *Clouds*, it is whirl (Dinos), not Nous, that unseats Zeus as cosmic sovereign (*Nub.* 379–81, 827–29, 1471–73).

So we have a *kratos* without force, an *arkhē* that is not really the *arkhē*, a Mind that lacks mind. Autocratic Nous is thus divided from himself: he is not self-same (*autos*), neither in his power nor in his being. Further, his power and his being are divided from one another. Nous is separate from everything else: that is essential to his exceptional being and sovereign power. But that separation also sets a limit on the very knowledge that defines him as Mind. We cannot reconstruct Anaxagoras’s theory of cognition from the extant fragments, but if it followed a principle of opposites, as his theory of perception did (according to Theophrastus, A92/D70, 72, 73), then Nous can know the things but not himself or his own power. What is an *autokratos* that cannot know itself? If, conversely, cognition follows a principle of like affecting like, then we might wonder, as Aristotle did, “if Nous is simple and

62. *Metaph.* 1.4. 985a18–21 (A47/R10). The critique is echoed and extended by Silvestre (1988). Von Fritz (1964) sees in Anaxagoras a compromise between *nous* as a quasi-divine ordering principle and as a mechanical cosmogonic force, and thus between a teleological and antiteleological explanation of the cosmos. On the question of Mind’s intent and Anaxagorean teleology, see Sedley 2008b, 20–25; Laks 2002b; and Lougnet 2002.

63. Clem. Al. *Misc.* 2.14 (= A57/≠LM). Simplicius defends Anaxagoras against this charge at B13/D29b and A53/R32. It seems clear that Nous is not cosmogonic in a strict sense, since the basic ingredients of the world preexist him. As many scholars note, his powers are organizational rather than generative; thus Sedley (2008b, 23): “*Nous* is a farmer.”

64. Contrast B13/D29b, where the *perikhōrēsis* merely continues the separation that Nous began. Note that Nous is absent from B15–17/D30, 31, 15, where the cosmogonic processes of separation and congealing proceed without his direction.

65. Hes. *Th.* 385; Solon 36.15–16; Aesch. *PV* 12; Stocking 2023, 87–90.

unaffected and shares nothing in common with anything, as Anaxagoras says, how it will think, if thinking means affecting something.”⁶⁶

Finally, it is not even clear that Nous ultimately succeeds in his *diakosmēsis*. If Nous’s intention in the *apokrisis* is to separate the things into discrete identities so that he may know and control them, Laks observes that he fails in his goal, for as B6/D25 says, “just as in the beginning so too now all things are together. And in all things there are many things even of the things being separated off.”⁶⁷ Even after Mind’s *diakosmēsis*, everything remains in everything—perhaps even Nous himself. In B12.9–10/D27 we hear that he is “lightest and purest of all things” (*leptotaton te pantōn khrēmātōn kai katharōtaton*). The partitive genitive makes him conceptually part of “all things,” and the adjectives are not masculine (as is usual for Nous) but neuter. Likewise, in the opening sentence of the fragment, even as Nous is “alone by himself” in the masculine forms (*monos autos*), he is described as *apeiron* and *autokrates* in the neuter.⁶⁸ Maybe Nous is just a *khrema* after all, as Plato and Aristotle suggest when the former complains that Anaxagoras makes insufficient use (*khrōmenon*) of Nous and the latter, that he uses (*khrētai*) Nous as a *mēkhanē*, a contrivance or tool. But if Nous is just one thing among all the others, if he is not separate and exceptional, then what is the basis of his *kra-tos*? As Laks concludes, “Whatever the achievements of νοῦς [*nous*] are, the principle according to which ‘everything is in everything’ imposes an absolute limit to its power.”⁶⁹

Laks’s formulation brings us back to the relation between Nous and the elements and invites us to think about it as a political relation. In Anaxagoras’s

66. Arist. *De an.* 3.4 429b22–25; cf. 1.2 405b19–23. Simplicius poses a related conundrum (*in Cael.* 60.8, 23 < B7/≠LM; cf. Arist. *Ph.* 1.4 187b7–12): since knowledge delimits the thing known, then either the *khrēmata* must not be *apeira*, as Anaxagoras says in B1/D9, or, if they are, Nous must be unable to know them. By that logic, Nous, who is likewise *apeiron* (B12.1/D27), cannot know himself either. On Anaxagoras’s epistemology and the problem of Mind’s knowledge, see further Von Fritz 1964; Laks 1993, 2002b; DeFilippo 1993; Leshner 1995; Curd 1998, 141–47, 2007, 192–205; and Louguet 2002, 510–22. On Anaxagoras’s theory of perception, see Warren 2007a.

67. Laks 1993, 32. Compare the end of B12/D27: even after Nous introduces number such that “each one” (*hen hekaston*) can be what it is, the principle of everything in everything still makes it impossible to distinguish many (*polla*) from all (*pantapasi*, B12.25/D27).

68. At B12.1/D27 Nous is contrasted to “the other things” (*ta men alla . . . nous de*), but is *alla* exclusive (“the other things”) or inclusive (“the rest of the things”)? Cf. B14/D28, where Nous “is most certainly even now where all the other things are” (*hina kai ta alla panta*). On the ambiguity of “lightest and purest of all things,” see Schofield (1980, 11–12): does this mean that Nous is particularly fine matter or not matter at all? Curd (2007, 59) believes that “in using the superlatives . . . Anaxagoras is again calling attention to the fundamental difference between *Nous* and the ingredients in the mix.” But see Derrida (2009, 256–65): the superlative makes the sovereign a member, albeit a superlative one, of the group to which he is compared.

69. Laks 1993, 32: “Complete separation is mind’s wishful thinking” (33; cf. 2002b; contra, Leshner 1995).

account, Nous has no genesis. Even as his miraculous appearance is represented as a new beginning and a sharp break with what went before, he always exists (*aei esti*, B14/D28), and his eternal being transcends the rift between before and after. Indeed, to the extent that the murky pre-Nous past becomes visible (*endēlon*) only from the clarifying vantage point of the post-Nous present, there is no “before” of Nous. His sovereignty was implicit from the start and his *kratos* is without origin.⁷⁰ Or rather, it is its own origin: when he “controlled (*ekratēsen*) the whole rotation so that it rotated to begin with (*arkhēn*)” (B12.13/D27), his *kratos* generates the *arkhē* and the *arkhē* enacts his *kratos* in a closed circle of ipsocentric self-positing.⁷¹

Yet behind this vision of eternal sovereignty we can detect traces of an obscure genealogy of Nous’s power, one that breaks its circle of self-legitimation. B12/D27 begins by introducing Nous as *autokrates*, his power pure and unconditional. But the sentences that follow show that Nous’s power is not, in fact, unconditional; indeed, it is quite literally conditional.

τὰ μὲν ἄλλα παντὸς μοῖραν μετέχει, νοῦς δὲ ἔστιν ἄπειρον καὶ αὐτοκρατὴς καὶ μέμικται οὐδενὶ χρήματι, ἀλλὰ μόνος αὐτὸς ἐπ’ ἑωυτοῦ ἔστιν. εἰ μὴ γὰρ ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ ἦν, ἀλλὰ τρωι ἐμέμικτο ἄλλωι, μετείχεν ἅν ἁπάντων χρημάτων, εἰ ἐμέμικτό τρωι· ἔν παντὶ γὰρ παντὸς μοῖρα ἔνεστιν, ὥσπερ ἐν τοῖς πρόσθετοι μοι λέλεκται· καὶ ἂν ἐκώλυεν αὐτὸν τὰ συμμεμειγμένα, ὥστε μηδενὸς χρήματος κρατεῖν ὁμοίως ὡς καὶ μόνον ἔόντα ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ. (B12.1–8/D27)

The other things have a share of everything, but Nous is unbounded and *autokrates* and has been mixed with no thing, but he is alone himself by himself. For if he were not by himself, but had been mixed with something else, he would have a share of all things, if he had been mixed with anything; for there is a share of everything in everything, as I have said before. And the things that were mixed together would prevent him from controlling any thing in the same way as he does being alone by himself.

70. This self-positing explains a certain temporal circularity in Anaxagoras’s discussion of the original state. Scholars have wondered, for instance, how in B1/D9 air and aether can be said to exist as discrete phenomena before their separation by the vortex and can predominate in that condition of total *summixis*. Inwood (1986, 26–27) notes the switch from the imperfect to the present tense at the end of the fragment (“for these are [*enestin*] greatest among all the things”) and proposes that we can only understand the predominance of these elements from the perspective of the future, after they will have been separated out by Nous. Following Inwood, we could say that the things in the original state have a virtual identity that only becomes actual after it is discerned by Nous. Cf. Lougnet (2002, 522–28), who argues that the things constitute the order of the cosmos in and of themselves; Nous merely makes that order manifest.

71. Derrida 2009, 67: “The concept of sovereignty will always imply . . . this autopoosition of him who posits or posits himself as *ipse*, the (self-)same, oneself.” It is this political *an-arkhē* that Schmitt (2005) designates the state of exception.

This is the only counterfactual condition in Anaxagoras's extant writings, and it is strikingly anomalous in a fragment that is otherwise content simply to assert Nous's existence, qualities, and activities in straightforward declarative statements.⁷² The syntactical anomaly becomes all the more striking when we note that it is in this conditional sentence that Anaxagoras first extends Mind's *auto-kratos* to *kratos* over other things—or more precisely, over no other thing, *mēdenos khrēmatos kratein*. While Nous's *auto-kratos* was positively asserted (*nous de estin . . . autokrates*), his power over the *khrēmata* is introduced under negation, in a counterfactual imagination of his powerlessness.

This counterfactual exposes both a repressed history of political conflict and the textual strategies of its repression. If Nous were mixed with anything else—which of course he is not—he would be subject to the principle of everything in everything. If that were the case—which, Anaxagoras repeats, it is not—that very principle of *summixis* would prevent (*ekōluen*) Nous from ruling. We are invited to imagine—if only for a second and under safe syntactical conditions—a violent *agōn* between Nous and the *khrēmata*. In this instant, we are reminded of Vernant's definition of *kratos* as inherently agonistic: "a matter of opposing force to force, power to power, in order to conquer or dominate."⁷³ Nous's *auto-kratos* claims to be self-grounding: it has always existed, "alone itself by itself." But in this counterfactual we glimpse a different narrative, a repressed story of opposition, struggle, and conquest. In this narrative, Mind's power does not lie in his ontological separation from the *khrēmata*, as Anaxagoras insists, but instead emerges out of an agonistic relation to them. The *khrēmata* lost this struggle—hence Nous's *kratos*—but in another sense perhaps they won, for their very mention here mixes Nous up with them, implicating him in the *summixis* of everything in everything and thus declaring that his *kratos* is not, in fact, *autokrates*. He is not a sovereign exception but merely one (victorious) thing among others.

That possibility is immediately foreclosed. It is foreclosed, first, by the counterfactual syntax and the logical circularity that resecures the self-legitimation of Nous's autocracy. That circle of self-legitimation is emphasized in the triple repetition of *ep' heautou* (Nous is by himself . . . if he were not by himself . . . but he is by himself). It is sustained by the causal conjunctions that make the nature of physical reality the explanation for Nous's separation: "For (*gar*) there is a share of everything in everything." Finally, if grammar, logic, and verbal repetition are not enough, the author inserts himself ("as I have said before," *moi lelektai*)—again,

72. Schofield (1980, 6–10, building on Deichgräber 1933, 347–53) differentiates the two styles of B12/D27: the archaic "solemn predication" of most of the fragment and the more complex argumentation of this section; cf. Ugolini 1985, 326–27. The closest parallel to the conditional syntax of this section is at the end of B4a/D13 (well discussed by Fränkel [1955, 288–91]), describing the probability of other worlds.

73. Vernant 2006a, 217. *Kōluō* may have originally implied physical restraint if it is based on the noun *kōla* (limbs), but any sense of that etymology seems to have been lost early on.

an almost unparalleled phenomenon in the extant fragments, and one to which we will return in the next section. This is a reminder that the *kratos* of Nous is not, in point of fact, ipsocentric and self-positing. It is posited by the philosopher, constructed through his labored logic, secured through his repetitive rhetoric, and guaranteed through his authorial presence. Nous's sovereignty is the product of philosophical, not just political, struggle.

In observing these strategies of textual production and revealing the history of political contest they obscure, we glimpse a concealed genealogy of Nous's purportedly eternal *kratos* and, with it, political potentialities rendered invisible by Nous's *diakosmēsis*. We noted how in the original state of things when the *khērēmata* were all together, individual identities were said to be imperceptible (*oude . . . endēlos ēn oudemia*) "because the *summixis* of all things was preventing it" (*apekōlue gar hē summixis pantōn khērēmatōn*, B4b/D12). This is the same language that in B12.7/D27 describes the counterfactual possibility that the things mixed together would prevent (*ekōlue*) Nous from dominating as he does. Reading the two fragments together, we can discern here that contest over partition of the sensible that Rancière places at the heart of the political. In B4b/D12 the commingled *khērēmata* were preventing Nous from imposing his vision on the world—or if we take the imperfect as conative, they were trying to do so. Was this just an attempt at obfuscation? Or was it an effort to preserve the variegated visual regime that existed before Nous, that plenum of shapes and colors and pleasures, of *polla kai pantoia khērēmata*, none resembling any other? Infinitely varied and intermeshed, the initial state of things was a complex perceptible order with its own structuring rules and relations. It already had its own aesthetics.

Nous is blind to this rich cosmos of things. When it surveys this *summixis*, Mind's eye perceives only obscurity, a chaos in which there is, literally, nothing to see. But if that prior order is invisible to all-seeing Nous, it is because Anaxagoras obscures it in order to preserve Nous's exceptionality. The things lack identity, apparently by nature. But if Nous is eternal and there is no time before him, then his qualities were conceptually available from the start, and Anaxagoras's refusal to share them with the *khērēmata* is a deliberate choice. In other words, if the things are obscure and uncountable, it is not because Anaxagoras cannot see or count them but because he *will* not: he denies them ipseity so as to prevent them from becoming like Nous. In so doing he curtails the political potentialities implicit in the original state of things, preventing their collocality from becoming a political community or their immeasurable *plēthos a dēmos*. He forestalls the manifestation of a latent egalitarian politics in the name of a metaphysics of sovereign singularity. But in the process he also renders that sovereignty strangely powerless and self-contradictory, as we have seen. By insisting on his ontological singularity, Anaxagoras isolates Nous from the world he rules, limiting the knowledge that grounds that rule and that defines him as Mind. Anaxagoras hobbles both the *autos* and the *kratos* of *Nous autokrates* in order to preserve his exceptionality. We should recall that in Schmitt's

definition the sovereign is not simply exceptional but “he who decides on the state of exception.” By this definition, it is Anaxagoras who is the sovereign.

VISION OF THE OBSCURE

To suggest this is to point to Anaxagoras’s ambivalent investment in the power of Nous. In Athens Anaxagoras was apparently nicknamed Nous, and as the mind that sees, knows, and organizes the world imagined in this text, the author has a special affinity for his protagonist.⁷⁴ Indeed, we might view Nous as the personification of the authorial mind within the text and a projection of its totalizing vision. The order of Mind’s *diakosmēsis* is the cosmic order discerned and described by Anaxagoras, and Nous’s knowledge is ultimately the author’s own.

Aligning himself with Nous’s omniscient gaze, Anaxagoras goes beyond the limitations of human perception to obtain a “vision of the obscure.” Sextus Empiricus reports that Anaxagoras faulted the senses, saying that “because of their feebleness we are not able to distinguish the truth” (*krinein t’alēthes*, B21/D5). The proof of their unreliability is the mixing of colors. If we take two dyes, black and white, and pour one into the other drop by drop, our sight will not be able to differentiate (*diakrinein*) the minute changes, “although they truly exist in nature.”⁷⁵ With our blunt vision we can see the gross phenomena created by the *apokrisis* but cannot discern the boundless *khremata* of which they are composed; we cannot see the everything in everything that constitutes “the truth” of physical reality. And yet for one who knows how to see, “appearances [or phenomena] are a vision of the obscure” (*opsis adēlōn ta phainomena*, B21a/D6).⁷⁶ The word *adēlōn* evokes the regime of visibility introduced by Nous, the new capacity to discern what each thing is “most manifestly” (*endēlotata*, B12.29/D27). Nous separated the imperceptible elements into visible phenomena; the fact that Anaxagoras uses the same word—*khrema*—for both shows that the former things are still obscurely present in the latter.⁷⁷ David Sider notes the “amphiboly” of *opsis*, which is both subjective (seeing) and objective (something seen).⁷⁸ Anaxagoras’s text mediates between the two. By allowing us to see with our minds the *khremata* we cannot see with our eyes, he allows us to grasp the objective reality of our world. In this way he lets us

74. Diog. Laert. 2.6 (< A1/P42); Plut *Per.* 4 (< A15/P43).

75. Only the first quotation is reported as Anaxagoras’s own words, but the example is likely to be drawn from him. See Warren 2007a, 32–35.

76. Sextus quotes this fragment in the course of a discussion of Democritus, and it is possible that he, not Anaxagoras, is the author. Sider (2005, 165–66) believes it is Anaxagorian.

77. “No thing (*khrema*) is born or dies but it is mixed together and distinguished out of the things that are” (*eontōn khrematōn*, B17/D15): the first *khrema* denotes phenomena, the second the basic elements. At B12.16–17/D27, Nous knew both “the things that are mixed together and the things that are separated off and becoming distinct.” To his panoptical eye, both the phenomena and the invisible things that compose them are equally manifest.

78. Sider 2005, 166–67: “The amphiboly seems intentional” (166).