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# *Schwerpunkt: Hermeneutik (in) der Antike*

## On Nature

by

JOHN SALLIS (Boston College)

*On Nature*. The title is of course a translation. As both Heidegger and Gadamer repeatedly attest, translation is always also interpretation; or rather, in the present case, since this translation goes back to the ancient rendering of φύσις as *natura*, it merely reinscribes an interpretation that has been in effect (though repeatedly reworked) since antiquity. In order for any originary access to be gained to what remains of early Greek thinking, it is imperative that this interpretation, implicit in the translation, be suspended and that it be acknowledged that we today know very little of what the early Greek thinkers meant by what we call – that is, translate as – *nature*. Neither do we know, therefore, to what extent – if at all – that which the Greeks thought as φύσις can be sustained by this traditional translation.

The title is also of course a citation, in fact a citation of a title, of a title that was supposedly very common among the early Greek thinkers. The later, though ancient, authors, by whom what we have of the early Greek texts is transmitted, report that the title Περὶ Φύσεως was used by Anaximander, Anaximenes, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Zeno, and Empedocles. Modern scholars regard these attributions with some reserve, noting that Alexandrian writers tended to supply titles where they were lacking or missing; in particular, they seem to have assigned this title, Περὶ Φύσεως, to major works of nearly all those whom Aristotle designated as φυσικοί.<sup>1</sup> While it cannot, then, be taken for granted that these thinkers actually applied this title to their writings, thereby indicating that their primary concern was with φύσις, the assessments of the later authors, including Aristotle, should not be simply discounted. Nonetheless, if it is to be shown that concern with φύσις is what primarily animated their thought, this must, in the final analysis, be demonstrated from the extant fragments of their writings.

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<sup>1</sup> See GEOFFRE STEPHEN KIRK, JOHN E. RAVEN, and MALCOLM SCHOFIELD, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, second edition, Cambridge 1983, p. 102.

In the development that began with the Milesians, a development that was by no means linear or homogeneous, the thought of Empedocles represents a certain culmination; in his thought much of what his predecessors had ventured was gathered up, rounded out, and brought to a certain fulfillment. In this fulfillment there were two primary moments, the first having to do with the character of the thinking that had by then begun to be called philosophy, the second pertaining specifically to the scope and articulation of φύσις.

As to the character of thinking, Empedocles' achievement consisted in formulating explicitly what had indeed been carried out from the beginning. Empedocles expresses with utter clarity the imperative under which such thinking had consistently placed itself. This formulation is found in one of the Fragments, Diels-Kranz B 3, handed down by Sextus Empiricus. It consists of three distinguishable parts, though the divisions between them are not very explicitly marked, so that some scholars suspect that in citing the passage Sextus may have omitted some transitional lines.<sup>2</sup>

The first part of the Fragment is an invocation, opening receptively the space of the discourse to come, asking of the gods that "from hallowed lips [...] a pure stream [might] flow" and beseeching the Muse to send "that which it is right and fitting for mortals to hear."<sup>3</sup> This opening makes it evident that the imperative of thinking that is about to be enunciated is not a pronouncement brought forth autonomously by the thinker; rather, it is to be evoked, its pure stream drawn forth, as the thinker hears what sounds from beyond, from the gods and the Muse, who, in letting the appeal to manifestness that constitutes the imperative be declared, remain themselves elusive.

In the second part of the Fragment, the thinker turns from the gods and the Muse to the mortal to whom the imperative is about to be declared. It is presumably Pausanias, Empedocles' young lover and pupil, who is now addressed in words intended to caution him against the danger of excessive pride. He is to beware of taking the garlands of honor that men will offer him and of coming thereby to sit on the high throne of wisdom.

Only with these preparations in place does Empedocles then, in the third part of the Fragment, state the imperative. He begins: "But come, consider by all means how each thing is manifest." Pausanias is thus enjoined to *consider* each thing in its manifestness. The word ἀθρόω, to consider, means to

<sup>2</sup> See M. R. WRIGHT, *Empedocles: The Extant Fragments*, Indianapolis 1995, p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> Citations and references generally follow Diels-Kranz. Translations are my own, though I have relied on KIRK, RAVEN, and SCHOFIELD, *Presocratic Philosophers*; WRIGHT, *Empedocles*, and DANIEL W. GRAHAM, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge, 2010.



look closely at, to observe carefully, to ponder thoughtfully. The imperative is, then, to consider, in this sense, each thing in its way of being *manifest* (δῆλον), that is, as it is evident, visible, as it itself shows itself. Each thing in its manifestness is to be considered *by all means* (πάσῃ παλάμῃ), in a sense that does not exclude the use of artfulness, contrivance, even force or violence; παλάμη means *palm* or *hand* and thus connotes the force or skill that can be exercised by the hand; and, by extension, it alludes to any means by which a certain result can be achieved. Thus, what is enjoined does not necessarily take the form of a mere passive beholding; in some instances recourse must be had to means capable of enticing things into the open in order to catch a glimpse of them at their very moment of manifestness.

Following the initial statement of the imperative to consider by all means how each thing is manifest, the passage continues: “neither holding sight in greater trust as compared with hearing, or resounding hearing above piercings of the tongue.” Note that Empedocles here refers to hearing as resounding (ἐπίδουπον). This designation is indicative of the doubling character that he takes hearing to have: to hear a sound requires that hearing redouble the sound, that it be echoed within.<sup>4</sup> The piercings of the tongue are of course the pores through which the tongue senses taste. Thus, Empedocles is declaring that equal trust is to be given to sight, hearing, and taste. The passage continues by extending this trust still further: “and do not withhold trust at all from other parts of the body where there is a passage [πóρος] for thinking [νοῆσαι].” The injunction concludes by restating the imperative, now with utter directness: “but think [νόεω – that is, ponder, consider discernfully] each thing in the way in which it is manifest.”<sup>5</sup>

The second of the two principal achievements by which Empedocles’ thought brings early Greek thinking to a certain fulfillment concerns φύσις; it lies in the way in which he extends φύσις to its full expanse while also retaining, indeed intensifying, its vital character. Yet this achievement is not immediately evident from the Fragments. Very few of the passages cited by later authors include the word φύσις, and even in the non-citational reports concerning Empedocles’ thought, the word occurs only rarely. When it does occur, either in citations or in reports, its usage seems to be, at best,

<sup>4</sup> In the context of a discussion of Empedocles, Theophrastus reports: “Hearing comes about from sounds inside. For when [air] is set in motion by the voice, it echoes inside” (DK, A 86).

<sup>5</sup> The connection that the imperative establishes between thinking and manifestness is expressed assertorically in DK, B 106, which reads: “For man’s wisdom grows according to what is present.” This Fragment comes from ARISTOTLE (Metaphysics 1009b18–19), who, construing it quite differently, cites it in the course of criticizing Empedocles for failing to distinguish between thought and perception (φρόνησις and αἴσθησις).

only obliquely related to the decisive sense that it assumed in Empedocles' predecessors such as Heraclitus and the Milesians.

An example is Fragment B 63, which comes from Aristotle's *Generation of Animals*.<sup>6</sup> Here Empedocles is cited as follows: "But the φύσις of the limbs is separated, part in the man." The context is one in which Aristotle is criticizing Empedocles' alleged theory of generation according to which part of the semen occurs in the male and part in the female, the preponderance of one or the other determining the sex of the embryo. Thus, in this context, filtered somewhat through Aristotelian lenses, φύσις refers simply to the semen from which is generated the limbs of living beings, that is, those beings themselves. While, in this context, the sense of the word is thus quite narrow, this very specificity is such as to secure the bond that is decisive for φύσις in its broadest expanse. For in the passage, φύσις can be taken to refer to that from which living beings are generated, that is, to that from which, through conception and birth, through the natural process of reproduction, living things come forth. What becomes evident from this citation is that the sense of φύσις is determined in large part by its derivation from the verb φύω (to bring forth, to beget – or in the passive: to grow, to come forth, to be begotten or born). Whatever else may need to be said, φύσις does not, for Empedocles, refer to some remote or even abstract principle of natural things; rather, its sense is bound to the happenings in and through which things come forth, as plants, seeded in the earth, sprout and burst forth into the light, as animals are begotten and come to be born.

Another among the few Fragments that include the word φύσις – the Fragment numbered B 110 – is again presumably addressed to the pupil Pausanias. Empedocles instructs him as to how he is to appropriate the thoughts expressed in his teacher's words and describes the consequence that will follow if they are thus appropriated. Here is how the appropriation is prescribed, in the form of a conditional: "If you push them firmly under your crowded thoughts and contemplate them favorably." Thus, the thoughts expressed in Empedocles' words are to be placed under (ὑπό) all the other, ordinary thoughts, including, as the passage goes on to say, "the countless trivialities that come among men and dull their meditations." If these underlaid thoughts are then favorably contemplated, they will remain, they "will be with you through life, and you will gain much else from them." What is it that is to be gained? What is the consequence of appropriating, contemplating, and thus retaining these thoughts laid under all others? The passage gives a succinct answer: "For they will make each thing grow into its ἥθος according to the φύσις of each." This says: if things

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<sup>6</sup> DK, B 63 (from ARISTOTLE, *Generation of Animals*, 764b17–18).

are regarded by proceeding from the secure underlaid thoughts, then they come to appear in their ἤθος, that is, in their proper character but also (to retain the older sense of the word) in their proper place, in their abode. Furthermore, each comes to appear in its manifestness as regards its character and abode because each is bound to its ἤθος by its φύσις. The conclusion is evident: the underlaid thoughts, properly cultivated, can bring things to appear in their ἤθος, can let them be regarded in their manifestness, because what is thought thereby is nothing other than φύσις. The thoughts that are to be underlaid, the thoughts expressed in Empedocles' words, are thoughts directed precisely to φύσις, from which things grow into their character, into their abode, and, through the words and thoughts of the philosopher, into their manifestness.

There is a Fragment (B 38), handed down by Clement of Alexandria, that purports to tell of that from which things become manifest. In its simplest form, omitting, for the moment, a much-disputed word, the Fragment reads: "Come, I shall tell you of the origin from which all the things we now look upon have become manifest, earth and billowing sea, damp air, and Titan aither who fastens his circle around all things." Here Empedocles uses the word ἀρχή (origin) rather than φύσις, though, judging from the Fragments already considered, it would seem that the sense of φύσις is convergent with that of origin. What is disputed in the passage is the word ἥλιον (*sun* – in the accusative singular), which in Clement's text occurs immediately before the word ἀρχήν, so that the passage would begin: "Come, I will tell you of the sun origin from which [...]." Various proposals have been made for altering the passage. Freeman, for instance, considers ἥλιον corrupt and, marking it as such, retains it only in parentheses. Wright's view is that the word is wrongly positioned in the sentence, so that it should read: "Come, I will tell you of the origin from which the sun and all things [...]." <sup>7</sup> Which of the various forms proposed is correct is prob-

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<sup>7</sup> Freeman thus renders the beginning of the sentence as: "Come now, I will tell you of (the sun) the beginning, [...] from which all the things [...]" (KATHLEEN FREEMAN, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, Oxford 1956, p. 57). Relocating the word ἥλιον and employing a hendiadys to render ἀρχήν, Wright translates this portion as: "Come now, I shall tell you from what sources, in the beginning, the sun and all those others" (WRIGHT, *Empedocles*, pp. 196–197.). Burnet alters ἥλιον to ἡλίου, though admitting that this is "a mere makeshift," and so translates: "Come, I shall now tell thee first of all the beginning of the sun, and the sources from which." (JOHN BURNET, *Early Greek Philosophy*, New York 1957, p. 212). Kirk and Raven, in their first edition, render the passage: "Come, I shall tell thee first of the sun, and whence became manifest all the things"; this is altered in the second edition to: "Come now, I shall tell you first from what [origins] in the beginning the sun and all those others [...]" (KIRK, RAVEN [and SCHOFIELD], *Presocratic Philosophers*, first edition, 1957, p. 332; second edition, 1983, p. 301).

ably not decidable on purely philological grounds, and preference for any particular form is likely to depend to an extent on the interpretation of the Fragment as a whole.

In this Fragment, Empedocles tells, in first person, of the ἀρχή (as he says) “from which all the things we now look upon have become manifest.” In other words, the ἀρχή of which he will tell is that by which all the things that are to be seen, that lie visibly before us, received their visibility as well as their manifestness to the other senses. This ἀρχή is, then, the origin of the manifestness of things, that is, the origin that initiated and sustained their coming forth into manifestness; since the verb γίγνομαι means also *to be born*, the origin can equally well be described as that from which all things were born into manifestness. Most decidedly, it is not the origin of their being, for of being there can be no origin, can never have been any origin. Fragment B 11, among others,<sup>8</sup> is explicit about this impossibility: it mocks the fools “who expect what was not before to come to be.” There is no coming to be, hence no origin of being, but only coming to be manifest, coming forth there before our senses. Here already it is evident that what the disputed word ἥλιον designates pertains to the ἀρχή, regardless of how the word is to be positioned in the sentence. For the sun is what preeminently bestows visibility upon the things that we look upon; it is preeminently the origin, the source, of the visible manifestness of things, that which makes things visible and lets them be seen by those who possess the power of sight. Thus, the origin that is described in this Fragment cannot be taken as the origin of the sun, as some renderings of it would require, for the sun is itself preeminently an origin of the manifestness of all the things we now look upon.

In Fragment B 23, Empedocles draws a parallel between the origination of visibility and that which painters accomplish when with their colors they form “shapes resembling all things, creating trees and men and women, animals and birds and water-nourished fish, and long-lived gods too, highest in honor.” Empedocles insists on the strictness of the parallel. He stresses that just as these shapes on the painted surface are not brought there from elsewhere but become manifest there through the art of the painter, so likewise the ἀρχή simply lets things come forth in their manifestness, lets them take shape there in their proper abode. The Fragment concludes: “So do not let deception [ἀπάτη] convince you that mortal things are from somewhere else [ἄλλοθεν], all the things that become manifest.” There is, then, no question of being. It is not as though things first came into being somewhere apart from the abode in which they come to be manifest. Things do

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<sup>8</sup> See also, for example, DK, B 12.

not simply come to be but only come to be manifest. Their character, their *ἦθος*, lies entirely in their being manifest in their abode – just like the forms that artists let take shape in their paintings.

Proposing to tell of “the origin from which all the things we now look upon have become manifest,” Empedocles – in B 38 – proceeds to articulate the origin in its fourfold structure: “earth and billowing sea, damp air, and Titan aither who fastens his circle around all things.” There is, then, as origin, first, earth. Empedocles uses the more poetic form *γαῖα*, which is found in Hesiod and most commonly in Homer, as well as by later writers. The word means land, as in a passage in the *Odyssey* that reads: “But when we had left Crete and no other land [*γαῖα*] appeared, but only sky and sea [*οὐρανός, θάλασσα*].”<sup>9</sup> The word can also designate earth as something to be shaped as by a potter, or as loose earth to be piled up to form a grave mound, as in Homer’s description of the burial of Patroklos.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps most significantly, *γαῖα* can designate the earth in distinction from the heaven (*οὐρανός*) and in its expansiveness and depth, as in Xenophanes’ Fragment 28: “This upper limit of earth is visible here at our feet touching air; the lower reaches down without limit.” Second, there is the billowing sea, the sea swelling with many waves (*πόντος πολυκύμων*). By using the word *πόντος* rather than *θάλασσα*, Empedocles refers to the open sea, as in Homer’s account of how Odysseus climbs to a high outlook on Circe’s island and observes the boundless sea (*πόντος ἄπειρος*) that lies all around.<sup>11</sup> The third is damp air (*ὕγρὸς ἀήρ*). In Homer the word *ἀήρ* means vapor, haze, mist, cloud, especially as a means of rendering invisible, as in Homer’s account of how, as Menelaus lunged at Paris determined to kill him with the bronze spear, Aphrodite saved Paris by wrapping him in a thick mist (*ἀήρ*).<sup>12</sup> Later the word refers primarily to the air of the lower, denser atmosphere, which is often damp, misty, hazy. Empedocles stresses this character by attaching the adjective *ὕγρὸς* (damp). The fourth is *αἰθήρ*, which designates the often bright, shining upper air or the sky (*οὐρανός*), which, thus encompassing all things, is aptly described as a Titan “who fastens his circle around all things.” The word *σφίγγω* (to fasten) means specifically to bind tight or to bind together within; *κύκλος*, designating a circle or ring, could refer to the horizon or to the entire dome that arises from it, and indeed the word sometimes means simply the vault of the sky. It is also not uncommon for *αἰθήρ* to be identified or at least closely associated with *πῦρ*

<sup>9</sup> HOMER, *Odyssey*, XIV, 301–302.

<sup>10</sup> See HOMER, *Iliad*, XXIII, 226–257.

<sup>11</sup> See HOMER, *Odyssey*, XX, 194–195.

<sup>12</sup> See HOMER, *Iliad*, III, 379–381.

(fire), especially with the πῦρ Διός, the fire of Zeus, that is, lightning.<sup>13</sup> If the sun, designated by the seemingly misplaced word ἥλιον, is taken also to be named in this articulation of the ἀρχή, then it belongs with the fourth; and indeed it, too, though differently from the horizon, traces a circle that encompasses all things.

The fourfold ἀρχή consists, then, of broad earth, open sea, damp air, and bright, uranic aither. It is from these four that all the things we now look upon have become manifest. Yet these four, which constitute the ἀρχή of all things, are not themselves simply things; rather, they are elemental expanses within which or in the crossings or mutual limits of which things can become manifest – as when, illuminated by sunlight, an ancient temple set firmly on the promontory in the distance yet obscured by mist is glimpsed from out at sea. On the other hand, these expanses that make up the ἀρχή are not simply other than the things that can become manifest amidst them. They are not set apart from the things they let become manifest; they do not operate from afar, but rather things come to light in their very density and expanse, which, though in a different manner, also are manifest. The things that become manifest belong to these archaic moments. They are *of* these elemental expanses: the loose earth that is piled up to form a grave mound is nonetheless earth, comes from the earth, is *of* earth; the water that fills my glass comes from the sea, from an inland sea or river; the moisture that condenses on the glass comes from the surrounding damp air; and the fire by which I warm myself replicates that of the heaven.

There are numerous other Fragments in which the four archaic moments are named, though, not insignificantly, they are in many cases named quite differently. In Fragment B 98, Empedocles speaks first of the earth. But here the word is neither γαῖα nor the less poetic variant γῆ but rather χθών. Though χθών can quite legitimately be rendered as earth, it refers especially to the surface of the earth – as in a passage in the *Odyssey* in which Homer describes how a dancer leaps up from the earth (ἀπὸ χθονός).<sup>14</sup> The phrase χθόνα δύνειν (or δύναι) means to go beneath the earth (beneath its surface), that is, to die – as in a passage in the *Iliad* in which Andromache, fearing that Hector will be killed in battle, tells her husband that if she loses him, it would be better if she too were to go beneath the earth, to die (χθόνα δύνειν).<sup>15</sup> The expression οἱ ὑπὸ χθονός designates those beneath the earth, that is, those who are among the shades in the underworld. Clearly, then, χθών is not a mere interchangeable synonym of γαῖα: χθών,

<sup>13</sup> See ANAXAGORAS, DK, A 84 (from ARISTOTLE, *Meteorology* 369b14–19; also ARISTOTLE, *On the Heaven* 270b24).

<sup>14</sup> HOMER, *Odyssey*, VIII, 375.

<sup>15</sup> See HOMER, *Iliad*, VI, 401–411.

connoting surface, has a different directionality, tending toward what lies underneath, whereas  $\gamma\alpha\tilde{\iota}\alpha$  has much more the sense of opening upward (toward the sky) and outward (in its broad expansiveness). The difference could be marked as the distinction between the gaidic earth and the chthonic earth.

Here, then, is the first part of the Fragment (B 98), in which the archaic moments are named: “Chthonic earth met with these in most equal measure, with Hephaistos, rain, and blazing aither, dropping anchor in the perfect harbors of Cypris.” There is one very evident way in which the first two moments come together: it is from beneath the surface of the earth that the metals to be forged by the smithy god are taken. But why does Empedocles refer to Hephaistos at all? Why does he cite the name of a god when, on the contrary, his aim is to tell of the origin of natural things, an origin that presumably is itself natural rather than mythical and that should, accordingly, be told of by way of a natural explanation? Is it simply that Empedocles has not yet fully escaped from the shadows of mythology into the clear light of natural explanation? That he might fall short of giving a natural explanation would indeed be a curious failing on the part of a thinker whose every thought seems to be oriented precisely to what we call nature, that is,  $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ . Is it self-evident that citing the name of a god is contrary to the aim of giving a natural explanation, assuming that it is clear what constitutes a natural explanation? Yet can the requirements of a natural explanation be determined apart from, in advance of, the philosophical determination of nature itself, of  $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ ? Would it not be necessary already to have given an account of nature as such in order to know what constitutes a natural account? It has of course been said that the name of the god is used merely to signify fire, of which Hephaistos is said to be the god. But why, then, the name Hephaistos and not simply the name fire ( $\pi\tilde{\upsilon}\rho$ )? What does the name Hephaistos say that goes unsaid by the word *fire*? What does it mean to say that Hephaistos is the god *of* fire? What does the *of* mean here? For there are other gods and demigods who have a distinctive relation to fire, most notably Zeus, who wields the thunderbolt, and Prometheus, who steals fire. Hephaistos’ relation to fire is significantly different: as a smith, he uses fire in order to give shape to things, in order to forge metal into manifest, properly shaped things. In some cases what he produces is wonderful to see. Thus, in the *Iliad*, when Thetis comes to the house of Hephaistos, he finds him fashioning twenty tripods that are “a wonder to behold” ( $\theta\alpha\tilde{\upsilon}\mu\alpha\ \iota\delta\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$ ).<sup>16</sup> Most marvelous of all is the shield that Hephaistos fashions for Achilles. On the shield he wrought, first of all, the earth, the sky, the sea, and the tire-

<sup>16</sup> HOMER, *Iliad*, XVIII, 377.



less sun (18:483 f.). It is as if Hephaistos forged the shield in such a way that this wonderful thing to behold reflected, in the images that adorned it, the fourfold ἀρχή itself. Little wonder, then, that Empedocles lets the name of the god name a moment of this fourfold.

The other archaic moments are rain, not simply water, which can occur almost anywhere, but rain, which comes from the heaven that things might grow from the earth; and, finally, blazing aither, shining on high and beaming down upon the earth. The Fragment speaks of how these four, chthonic earth, Hephaistos, rain, and blazing aither, met, how they came together in a certain equilibrium, a certain accord. The Fragment locates this meeting in the perfect harbor of Cypris; Cypris (Κύπρις) is one of the names of Aphrodite, derived from the name of the island of Cyprus, where at the sanctuaries of Paphos and Amathus she was most venerated. In Homer she is the wife of Hephaistos. She is affiliated with the sea and with seafaring and is said to have been born from the sea; hence it is at her harbor that the four drop anchor and enter into accord. Above all, she is the advocate of generation and fertility, providing a place where, through crossings of the archaic moments, things might be born into their manifestness.

The Fragment (B 98) concludes by identifying what, once anchor is dropped in the perfect harbor of Aphrodite, originates from the accord of the archaic moments. It is flesh and blood, that is, animate beings. Among these are humans, who, supported and nourished by the rain-soaked earth, are not only discernful but also possess the craft of forging images of that which their far-seeing vision beholds, even of the ἀρχή itself.

Fragment B 6 again names – again differently – the four archaic moments. It reads: “The four roots of all things hear first: shining Zeus, life-giving Hera, Aidoneus, and Nestis, who by her tears moistens the mortal spring.” What is perhaps most remarkable in this Fragment is that it offers another generic designation for the ἀρχή. The four are called roots (ρίζώματα). The word refers primarily to the roots of trees, though there are various metaphorical extensions, for instance, to ancestry. Later sources such as Simplicius use the word στοιχεῖον (*elementum*, *element*) in their reports of Empedocles’ theories, in this connection following Aristotle and Theophrastus.<sup>17</sup> But the word does not occur in any of the Fragments, and with good reason: the four are not elements from which things are made. Originally the word στοιχεῖον referred to the “elements” of λόγος, that is, letters and syllables, and it is only with Plato – and not without expressed hesitation

<sup>17</sup> DK, A 28 (from SIMPLICIUS, Physics, XXV, 21–31): “He makes the corporeal elements [σωματικὰ στοιχεῖα] four in number” See also DK, A 52 (from ARISTOTLE, Metaphysics, 1000b18–20).



on his part – that the word is extended to φύσις. For Empedocles the four are not elements from which things are composed but rather are roots from which things emerge and grow into the light.

When, in Book 1 of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle reviews what his predecessors took to be the primary ἀρχή, mentioning water, air, and fire, he credits Empedocles with “adding earth [γῆ] as a fourth to those already mentioned.”<sup>18</sup> Yet what is remarkable is not only that he adds a fourth, one that in fact none had set down as the sole ἀρχή, but that he construes all four in reference to the earth, in which things take root. All four archaic moments, regardless of how they may be further characterized, have the character of roots and to that extent have their place in the earth, that is, in their way of reaching down into the earth.

This referral of the archaic moments back to the earth serves to underscore that Empedocles regards the ἀρχή entirely in relation to generation, not generation of being, but the generation by which vegetative life germinates in the earth and emerges into the light and the open air, as well as that by which animate beings are born. What is perhaps most conspicuous by contrast with subsequent Greek philosophy is the total lack of reference to making or production (ποίησις, τέχνη). Beings are not to be regarded as if they – even those that belong to nature – were made through imposition of form on shapeless material. One could say that in this respect Empedocles’ thought remains closer to nature, keeps it apart from the paradigm of human artifice, of τέχνη. There is here hardly a trace of the contention that will later erupt between these two sides, most conspicuously perhaps in Plato’s *Timaeus*,<sup>19</sup> to say nothing of the dominance of τέχνη over nature that will subsequently set in.

In Fragment B 6, each of the four roots is identified as a god. The first of these is the one who is foremost among the gods, shining Zeus. Zeus – one will readily say – is lord of the heaven (οὐρανός), ruling there like a king and wielding his deadly, yet light-giving, yet also blinding, thunderbolt. Yet there is at least one feature that renders Zeus quite different from ordinary kings: whereas mortal kings want nothing more than to be seen in all their glorious presence by those subject to them, Zeus is, like all gods, elusive. He is hardly to be seen at all, and when he does appear, it is often in disguise so that he goes unrecognized, as in his many amorous pursuits. Still, mortals, erecting temples for him, must somehow have caught sight of him, even if only in a fleeting glance, even if only in an evanescent presence. It is in the

<sup>18</sup> DK, A 28 (from ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, 984a6–9).

<sup>19</sup> See my discussion in JOHN SALLIS, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato’s “Timaeus,”* Bloomington 1999, chapters 1–2.

luminous heaven that traces of shining Zeus can be glimpsed. Whereas his brothers remain elusive by retreating from the light, Hades into the shadowy underworld, Poseidon into the depth of the sea, Zeus can go largely unseen amidst – and because of – the very excess of light. As one of the four roots, Zeus is not a mere mythical personification of sunlight or fire. Rather, in the figure of Zeus the very character of light, of the fire of heaven, is posed: that it reigns over and illuminates all things, while remaining itself largely unseen, even threatening us, by way of the lightning flash and of the intensity of direct sunlight, with temporary or even permanent blindness.

In the enumeration of the four roots, shining Zeus is followed by life-giving Hera. In the effort, launched already in late antiquity, to reduce this Fragment to pure allegory and so to demythologize it, commentators have debated as to which root Hera is meant to allegorize. On the one hand, Aetius proposes air, perhaps because of the assonance of the two words, also perhaps because in the form of breath, air is necessary for life. On the other hand, Hippolytus proposes to identify Hera with the earth; this proposal can be defended on the ground that in Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns *life-giving* is an epithet of earth.<sup>20</sup> And yet, the word *φερέσβιος* has also the more specific sense of life-bearing, and indeed it is this sense that makes it a fitting epithet for earth, from which all vegetative life is born. If one resists the reductive approach, then it suffices to regard life-bearing Hera as the archaic moment from which things are born into their manifestness. In this case, Hera would not be simply one moment alongside others but rather would bear the character of *ἀρχή* as such. From the life-bearing origin, all things would be born into the light, the reign of which lies with her consort Zeus.

There has been similar debate regarding the identification of Aidoneus. The name (*Αἰδωνεύς*) is a lengthened, poetic form of *ἄϊδής* (unseen). Hippolytus thus argues that Aidoneus allegorizes air (*ἀήρ*) on the ground that “although we see all things through it, it is the only thing we do not see” (A 33). On the other hand, this is the same word as *Ἅιδης* (Hades), and on this basis Aetius proposes that the name stands for earth (*γῆ*). Yet it would be more fitting to affiliate this root with *χθών* rather than *γῆ*, with the chthonic earth rather than the gaidic earth. But, still resisting reductionism, it would be even more fitting to let it be informed by the connection with the words for Hades and for the unseen. For these are ways of saying the retreat, the withdrawnness, that belongs to life – after it ends, of course, but also especially before it begins, the withdrawnness that must be endured by all living things in order that they might then grow into the light. Before they

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<sup>20</sup> HESIOD, *Theogony*, 693; Homeric Hymn to Apollo, 341; see also the discussion in WRIGHT, Empedocles, pp. 164–166.

emerge so that we may look upon them, living things must persist within the closure of the earth or the darkness of the womb.

How the name of the fourth root, Nestis, is to be heard borders on the undecidable. She barely appears in classical literature and is identified only as a Sicilian goddess. Hippolytus takes her as an allegorical figure for water, since the name means fasting, not eating; his argument is that water is the vehicle of – but does not provide – nourishment. It has been suggested that Nestis is a Sicilian name for Persephone; Empedocles' description that "by her tears [she] moistens the mortal spring" could, then, be taken to locate her with the underground streams capable of providing moisture to the nourishing chthonic earth. But here there is scant evidence.

The passage that makes up Fragment B 21 Empedocles offers as a witness meant to compensate for any lack in his previous account.<sup>21</sup> In the first part of the passage, he again names – again differently – the four roots: "sun, brilliant to sight and everywhere hot, and immortal things soaked in heat and bright sunlight, and rain, dark and chilling in everything, and from the earth come forth things rooted and solid." Two points need to be stressed in this part of the Fragment. First, the immortal things soaked in heat and bright sunlight may be taken as the heavenly bodies (as Wright actually translates the phrase)<sup>22</sup> or, more broadly, as the aither in a sense that expands to include the sky (οὐρανός). Second, Empedocles makes explicit that the earth is here to be regarded as that from which solid vegetative forms, sustained by their rootedness in the earth, emerge and grow into the light.

Yet what is most remarkable about this Fragment (B 21) is the subsequent description it gives of the manner in which all the things we now look upon have become manifest. Empedocles declares, first of all, that in rancor (ῥότος) the roots remain divided and separated, but in friendship (φιλότης) they come together. Then, in the remainder of the passage, he tells how, through this coming together, the things we now look upon come to lie there before our senses. He writes: "From them [i. e., from the roots]

<sup>21</sup> In the source text, SIMPLICIUS' *Physics*, DK, B 21 is cited almost immediately after DK, B 17, and on this basis it would appear that DK, B 17 is the account that DK, B 21 sets out to supplement. On the other hand, there is no guarantee that passages cited sequentially by Simplicius were necessarily sequential in Empedocles' text. The issue has now been further complicated by the publication of the Strasbourg Papyrus, which contains what appears to be a continuation of DK, B 17 that extends far beyond the citation given by Simplicius (see GRAHAM, *Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 350–354).

<sup>22</sup> WRIGHT, Empedocles, p. 177. In KIRK, RAVEN, and SCHOFIELD, the suggestion is that what is probably intended are "breezes and expanses of air"; also perhaps, considering the assonance between ἄμβροτος (immortal) and ἀμβροσία (ambrosia), the food of the gods regarded as vapors steeped in heat and light by the sun (Presocratic Philosophers, p. 294).

all things that were, that are, and that will be sprang [βλαστάνω – to bud, sprout, burst forth, grow] – trees, men and women, beasts and birds and water-nourished fish, and long-lived gods foremost in honors. For there are just these [namely, the roots], which, running through each other, assume different appearances; so much does the mixing change them.” There is perhaps no other Fragment that is so explicit about the manner in which all things come to grow into their appearance from the four roots. What determines things in their manifest appearances is the way in which the roots run through one another like the intertwining roots of a tree. Everything depends on their mixing – on how, in the idiom of this Fragment – the sunlight shining in the aither comes together with the rain-soaked earth. That even the gods are mentioned among these things, even though some are also identified as roots, is again indicative that the ἀρχή is not something set apart from the things brought forth.

In this regard, the beginning of Fragment 22 is especially pertinent. It reads: “For all these – shining sun and earth [χθών] and sky and sea – are one with their own parts that by nature [πέφυκεν] wander off [ἀποπλaxθέντα] among mortal things.” The god who is a root – Zeus, for instance – is one with the god who appears – if always elusively – from the mixing of the roots. The mixing occurs as the roots go wandering out, go astray amidst the very things that they let come forth. The mixing and the wandering out occur *by nature*. As Empedocles writes in the concluding lines of Fragment B 8: “There is only mixing and separating of what has been mixed, and to these men give the name φύσις.”

In the end, it is imperative to declare that in Empedocles the ἀρχή is said in many ways. The many names given to the four moments, even the generic name *root*, are not to be dismissed as mere poetic metaphor or as mythological personifications of natural phenomena. Rather, these names are the names by which Empedocles undertakes to think the manifold workings of the ἀρχή. Since these workings, the mixing and wandering out of the roots, are the very workings of what is called *nature*, it follows that these names, as they themselves mix and wander off semantically toward one another, provide the means for writing, in the most fitting way, on nature.

## Summary

This essay shows how Empedocles brought to a certain fulfillment much of the thought of the early Greek philosophers. In particular, it shows that this fulfillment involved two primary moments: first, Empedocles’ determination of the character of the thinking that had begun to be called philosophy; and second, his extension of the sense of φύσις and his manifold articulations of it into variously characterized ῥιζώματα (“roots”).

## Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag zeigt, auf welche Weise Empedokles vieles von dem zur Vollendung bringt, was im Denken der frühen griechischen Philosophen angelegt ist. Zwei Momente sind für diese Vollendung wesentlich: Erstens Empedokles' Bestimmung des Denkens, das gerade anfängt, Philosophie genannt zu werden; zweitens seine Erweiterung der Bedeutung von φύσις und die Auseinanderlegung dieses Wortes in seine verschiedenen ῥιζώματα (,Wurzeln').

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