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Approaching Empedocles through PWL practices

Abstract:

To approach the poem-fragments of Empedocles as a discourse emerging from the drama of living, is to allow their performatively theorized snapshots to return from mere stills to moving images of practice in modulated stages of training. This study will propose two ways of approach: aesthetically, and as a transformative spiritual exercise (*askēsis*). The aesthetic way employs four terms from Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, and the way of spiritual exercise follows Hadot's four stages of a Goethe inspired practice from his text, *Don't Forget to Live*. Adorno's four terms (fragmentary, enigmatic, fixated, shudder), work as a frame for Empedocles' poem-fragments (and those of other Presocratics), that dovetails with PWL practices, and examples of self-transformation, both personal and historical. Nested within each of Hadot's four stages, including a conclusion on the "deaths of Empedocles," I have placed and re-ordered a selection of Empedocles' fragments in my translation that reframe the poem-fragments back to their continuing ways of coming back to life as *memento vivere*. This study, stages, and examples serve as a guide to a larger project involving a re-translating and re-sequencing (re-ordering) of all of Empedocles' extant fragments. Such a task hopes to add to the PWL's cartographic and hermeneutic project of the arts of living, teachers of ways of living, and as an alternative and vibrant history of philosophy.

Keywords:

Empedocles, aesthetic, Adorno, spiritual exercise, Hadot, PWL practices

Empedocles of Acragas (Agrigento, Sicily, c. 493–433 BCE), from whom we have enticing legends, and nearly 450 lines of the hexameter poem-treatises, *On Nature*, (*Ta physika* or *Peri physeōn*.) and *Purifications* (*Katharmoi*), can be considered the mannerist of Presocratic philosophy. His brief apprenticeship with Parmenides is a chronological possibility, as was his direct knowledge of Pythagorean practices from his visit to Thurii (in 444–443), where he could have encountered a few of the Orphic tablets from what was once Croton, Pythagoreans, and such figures as Herodotus, Hippodamus of Miletus, and Protagoras. His use of Pythagorean teachings, way of life, and diet had him accused of divulging their secrets. Throughout his poem-treatises, rich in similes, one notices the melding of previous teachings, most clearly Parmenidean motifs, and the more trenchant Heraclitian use of opposites and strife, accompanied by traditions in mysticism and the healing arts. Empedocles is a hybrid of philosophical community and iconoclastic-performative wandering philosopher, a syncretic thinker, part rationalist, part rhetorician, and part mystic and plural-poetic-postmonist. Due to this, I consider these performative poems as one unified work and voice. Many scholars past and present disagree with this unified poem model, separating the physical-cosmological and ethical-spiritual doctrines.¹ The aim of this study, fully aware of the topoi of creative error genealogy that drives the niches of scholarship past and present, is to prepare a stage for rereading the fragments in a more focused and inclusive tone from Empedocles' teaching of philosophy as (and from) an example of philosophy as a way of life (PWL).

To engage with the fragments of Empedocles is to enter into a discourse emerging from the drama of living set against a complacent reading as end in itself. To listen

1) First was Aristotle, sanguine to the point of ignoring the *Purifications* (*Katharmói*), and there followed a multitude of attempts to systematize the poem's lack of unity approach, later championed by Wilamowitz-Möllerndorff in *Die Katharpoi des Empedocles*. In the other camp, sanguine for the poem's unity was spear-headed by Pseudo-Hippolytus (or Hippolytus of Rome), a third century Bishop, who pulled them into the niche of Christian polemics. Erwin Rodhe saw the two poems as two perspectives of the soul's unity (Rodhe, *Psique*, 204–10. Much followed, and Ettore Bignone, gave further support to Rodhe's position with fragment details from *On Nature*, (*Peri Physiká*) and *Purifications* (*Katharmói*) to counter the unacceptable split between material versus spiritual parts. (Bignone, *Empedocle. Studio critico*. For the overwhelming ways and byways, and more recent Empedoclean niches, see the following studies and texts: <https://sites.google.com/site/empedoclesacragas/home>. See also Colli, *Empedocle*, 213–15; Tonelli, *Empedocle di Agrigento*, 271–75; Martin and Primavesi, *L'Empédocle de Strasbourg*. 378–96; Laks and Most, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 319–20. For an imaginatively curated early study see, Sturz, *Empedocles Agrigentinus*.

to the text as living words is to allow its performatively theorized snapshots to return from mere stills to moving images of a teaching in modulated stages of training. This disclosed perceptibility, and inclusive tone is possible through a hermeneutics of con-version that distinguishes PWL practices of self-transformation and conversions of ways of life, from the specialists' academically annealed construction of systems from anxious gate keeping through narrow commentary that entrenches their labors within assigned academic furrows. With Empedocles, we have a way of life from a fusion of a plurality of precepts, as opposed to a theory where lives are set in suspended animation. This is what distinguishes his particular mannerist and intellectual form of bricolage as an example of PWL practices, where life itself serves is a constructive interference, not a halting destructive interference of chanted doctrinal flat lines. As a key author in the history of philosophy in what is emerging as the project of reading the history of philosophy through the lens of PWL practices, Empedocles' mediations of experience and concept lead us to his own examples of being taught. These were exercises in being *taut* from the lived-teaching practices of Parmenides and the Pythagoreans, and engagement (and rupture) with his community. These choices are the first steps of self-transformation from traveling (a living form of bricolage), that with each outreach and each encounter enhances life-changing possibilities as the very horizon of one's life.

Of all the Presocratic thinkers Empedocles biographical tales, as apocryphal as they appear, give us signs of his way of life, and involvement in the social and political life of his city (c. 470–460). There he led the democratic overthrow of the tyrant Thrasydaeus (son of Theron), called for political equality, and refused the kingship offered him by the citizens of Acragas. His subsequent turning away from political involvement, lead him into exile around 450, though he returned to his first public space, “upon the sacred rock beside the blonde Acragas, and lofty citadel,” enchanted below by the Valley of Temples, the landscape of Sicily, and surrounded by the sea.²

To approach Empedocles is to find oneself wandering through fields of disputed boundaries, some set in stone, others toppled, and most rearranged and fought for, as seen in century-old property lines of stone and fallen markers set across Sicily itself. From such a landscape of bewildering order, that recreates itself

2) Empedocles, *Katharmói*, B 112.

from disputes and creative errors, scholars find themselves captive when asked about their approach to reordering and translating the fragments of Empedocles. The poem-fragments of Empedocles serve as an enchanting embodiment of the positional theses of such an approach, set across a vast landscape of the property lines of previous interpretive systems, each caught within the brambles of historical hermeneutics. There is no approach *ex nihilo*, nor one not fraught with arranged, developed, or imagined dispositions *ab ovo*. Consider this approach as another example of “creative error genealogy” recently outlined by Kramer and Herstein.³ I am fully aware that my attempt in this study finds itself between what Kramer and Herstein called “creative anachronism” and “creative interpretation,” and under the umbrella of “creative systematization.”⁴

This study will propose two ways to approach Empedocles: aesthetically, and as a transformative spiritual exercise (*askēsis*). These conjoined activities (inherent in the fragments themselves), help re-form a theory of orientation and practice from a Philosophy as a Way of Life (PWL) approach. As previously mentioned, within the fragments of Empedocles we have a way of life from a fusion of a plurality of precepts, as opposed to a theory where lives are set in suspended animation. This is a high example of PWL practices, where life itself serves as a constructive interference, not a halting destructive interference of chanted doctrinal flat lines. As a veritable therapeutics of the soul, and when the fragments are re-sequenced as will be sketched out in this study, Empedocles’ approach unveils a haunting encounter and precedence of the three models of the theory-practice of wisdom (*sophia*) as seen by Juliusz Domański.⁵ There is the harmonious and just practice of wisdom from various fields of knowledge, then in Empedocles’ late style, there are meditative exercises on death and divine becoming, and throughout his teachings, there is the grasp of ethics from the aspects of the life of citizens, the aspects of friendship, and finally the contemplative life. These entwined models of practices belong to the emergence of, and continuous ripples within the history of philosophy. The potential of the PWL project, as I envision it from the example of rereading Empedocles’ fragments is the

3) See Kramer and Herstein, “Creative Error Genealogy,” esp., 376–82.

4) Ibid., 377–79.

5) Domański, *La Philosophie, Théorie ou Manière de Vivre?*, Préface de Pierre Hadot, 12–16.

unique ability to work not only in a hermeneutics of con-versions, but of transposition of theoretical stills into moving images in the practice of teaching what is still alive in philosophy as a way of life.

Such is my approach toward initiating a transformative relationship and dialogue with Empedocles' fragments in the spirit of PWL, so as to undertake a complete translation and re-sequencing (reordering) of the poem-fragments, as I have done with those of Parmenides, loosened from the knots of previous approaches (trenchant, naïve, or not).⁶ This study serves as a primer toward that goal.

An Aesthetic Way

The aesthetic is my first way, or stage, into Empedocles' poem-fragments. There is little doubt that the poem-fragments resonate as a comportment of an artwork, as did the figure of Empedocles, portraying a drama that beckons a rendition that when working with his fragments cashes out as one's own drama from engaging in, reflecting upon, and especially in translating, and re-sequencing the fragmentary. The drama that one undergoes presents yet another enigma to interpret and question. The first enigma was Empedocles' own drama, and yet, both are now fixated from exposure to the fragment's rich poetic-didactic incitement to shudder. The "fragmentary," the "enigmatic," the "fixated," and the "shudder" serve as a first quaternary to approach Empedocles' work and legends. Long ago, while growing up in Sicily, when introduced to this "clever myth-telling [Sicilian] man,"⁷ and of all places, on the very slopes of Mount Etna, I also discovered Adorno's voluminous *Teoria Estetica* (1975), where these four terms (the fragmentary, enigmatic, fixated, and shudder), were interspersed on a few pages of a work left incomplete at his death in 1969.⁸ Developing these four terms (with the benefit of invoking the recollection of being shaken from what felt like a primal experience of striated place-names), serve as one of my lenses to approach the poem-fragments of Empedocles, while

6) Privitello, "Approaching the Parmenidean Sublime"; and Privitello, "Approaching the Parmenidean Sublime, Part II."

7) Plato, *Gorgias*, 493a.

8) Adorno, *Teoria Estetica*. All citations are from the English translation: Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, hereafter cited parenthetically as AT.

remaining faithful to Adorno's aesthetic category of the "fragmentary."⁹ The fragment is an unrealized possibility, a brushing up against a projected grasp of a metaphysical (immanent) experience. For Adorno, philosophy's task is to focus on the "incomplete, contradictory, and fragmentary,"¹⁰ and therein to "detect in these fragments the trace of possible developments, of something hopeful that stands in precise opposition to what the totality appears to show."¹¹ Adorno correctly saw the "fragment [as] that part of totality of the work that opposes totality" (AT, 45), and where the "fragment is the intrusion of death into the work. While destroying it, it removes the stain of semblance" (AT, 361). This non-identity not only presents itself in Empedocles' poem-fragments as a living praxis, it also carries one through the study of Empedocles from the guidance of philosophy as a way of life, and as my concluding considerations and final graph will display, into the way of life and the legends of the death(s) of Empedocles.

The Fragmentary and Co.

Figure 1 displays the dynamic between the Fragmentary, Enigmatic, Shudder, and Fixated. The red line from the fragmentary to the enigmatic initiates the process, and is what first confronts us, while the enigmatic cuts a diagonal through the field to the fixated (historical), unearthing the ways in which the fragmentary has come to be known. The fixated becomes the belabored scenic backdrop that reveals, veils, or totalizes the fragmentary. The enigmatic and the shudder work instantaneously and in tandem, unmoored from the fixated, and where being and knowing fuse in the briefest of instances as the promise of interpretative fulfillment, or dream of a lived metaphysics of childhood.

9) My use of "aesthetics," remains within an Adornian perspective, and problematizes the use of traditional aesthetics in terms of "the beautiful" and the "ugly," since the "greatest works of art are rarely those of a strictly peaceful [strife-less] nature" (AT, 50). Beauty is "something that originated in the renunciation of what was once feared [strife], which only as a result of this renunciation – retrospectively ... became the ugly" (AT, 47). In a turn of phrase, that seems straight out of Empedocles' speeches, Adorno also added, "Ugliness would vanish if the relation of man to nature renounced its repressive character" (AT, 47).

10) Adorno, *The Adorno Reader*, 31.

11) Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 91.

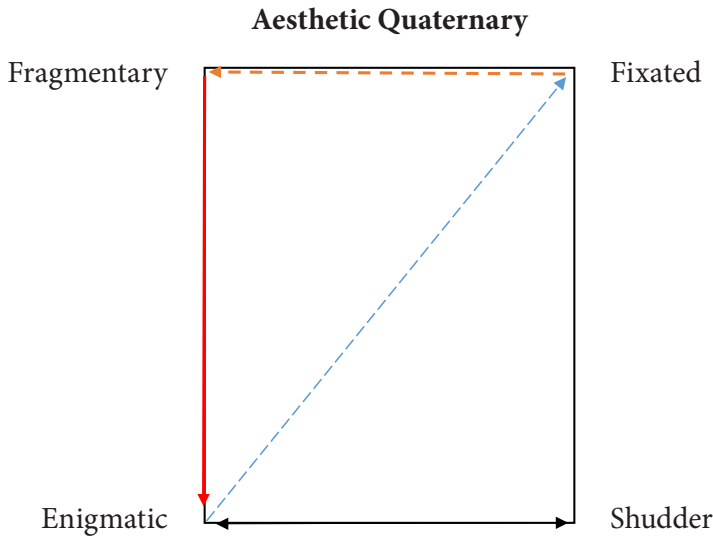


Figure 1

The fragmentary, or “fracturedness,” is what maintains the work’s enigma, and the enigma, is where works “deny what they would actually like to be” (AT, 126). The link between the fragmentary and the enigmatic are amplified in the field of Presocratic scholarship, as part of the fixated historical hermeneutical process when approaching Empedocles. “It was through history that they became an enigma” (AD, 120). Examples of said histories are present in the tomes and articles that we leaf through from past and present Empedoclean scholarship.¹²

In Adorno’s words, “The artwork’s enigmaticalness is the shudder, not however in its living presence, but as recollection” (AD, 286). We have, at this stage of a study of Empedocles, much to recollect. Yet, this gives hope and work to philologists, classicists, and philosophers, but also reveals moments of reverent reliance that binds one to a bewildering amount of scholarship of intentional or unintentional interpretive latitudes.¹³ Between these latitudes one’s approach sways, tossed from between more or less commonplace interpretations before encountering the poem-fragments themselves. One must turn and face the fragmentary.

12) For an extensive list of scholarly publications including translations, and commentary, along with conferences, on Empedocles see <https://sites.google.com/site/empedoclesacragas/home>.

13) See Kramer and Herstein, “Creative Error Genealogy,” 350–84.

The link of the enigmatic to the shudder stems from, and is the tremor produced by encountering the fragmentary. One must not allow previous systematizations in sequencings, of the poem-fragments to interrupt a living, and at times, bewildering, engagement. Here, one must face the shudder full of *horror et divina voluptas*. The shudder, in this case, and due to travels through a genealogy of philosophical scholarship, is an “afterimage,” (aftershock) which is the “paradoxical unity or the [precarious] balance between the vanishing and the preserved” (AT, 80).¹⁴ Here too, more hope and work await readers of the fragments of Empedocles, as they pry apart previous scholarship of doctrine from the performative poem-fragments. Yet, this hope comes with a caveat. For Adorno, “The shock aroused by important works is not employed to trigger personal, otherwise repressed, emotions. Rather, this shock is the moment in which recipients forget themselves and disappear into the work; it is the moment of being shaken” (*Erschütterung*), and perhaps even stirred (AT, 244). It becomes difficult to loosen the coils surrounding the preservation of one’s self when a chorus of approaches are ringing in one’s ear. The shudder (or the realization of being shaken, shattered, or devastated), “is a memento of the liquidation of the I, which, shaken, perceives its own limitedness and finitude” (AT, 245).

This realization of the ever-expanding and adjustable apparatus of knowledge set one into a perpetual search (*zetetic*), from an attitude tempered at the forge of imagined master codes and unconditioned impressions. This heating and quenching of one’s mettle brings about an epistemic and ethics of humility, products of a differential tempering from the forge of “vulnerable thinking” (*ungedecktes Denken*).¹⁵ In Hölderlin’s *The Death of Empedocles*, Empedocles aptly uttered the terms “shuddering exaction” while legendarily contemplating death on Etna’s rim.¹⁶ He too, no doubt, in search of liquidating his I. It is at this point and upon proverbial rims where, in the words of Adorno, “The capacity for fear and for happiness are the same, the unrestricted openness to experience amounting to self-abandonment in which the vanquished rediscovers himself.”¹⁷

14) Recall Goethe’s “The best part of [the human] is the shudder.” See Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 274.

15) Adorno, “Notes on Philosophical Thinking,” 132.

16) Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles*, 10, 103.

17) Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 200, §128.

One term remains to be uncovered from this aesthetic quaternary. It is Adorno's single mention of the term "fixated." The fixated is the dynamic "process between what has been fixated and the spirit [as] the history of the work" (AT, 193). Herein centuries old interpretative latitudes form a blurry grid by repeated tracings and erasures over vertical/veridical markings and spill over as the wealth of intellectual history itself. From said struggle, the fixated transforms into a ritual communal wellspring, creating either a cutout figure, theoretical bullet-points, or entrenched schools of thought. While the fixated therein would gain momentum in and as the enigmatic, one easily loses sight of the position of the fragmentary in the poem-fragments of Empedocles. For those who wish to hold fast to a complete rendition or proffer a total or absolute fully adequate fixed interpretation, or *phantasma bene fundatum*; Adorno's response is, "If you want the absolute, you shall have it, but you will not recognize it when you see it," citing how artworks speak like elves in fairy tales (AT, 126, 279).

Shudder Life

Empedocles' poem-fragments stretch the limits of a treatise or handbook, due to perpetually rising and collapsing from an incantatory syncopation of a voice, and a shuddering form of life. It is paramount to hear, stay close to, and follow that voice when translating and re-sequencing the poem-fragments, and from therein risks await. Empedocles' poem was a dramaturgy of philosophical-ethical knowledge. Performance trans-forms matter of fact (obsessional descriptive reductionist logicist objectivity), to matters of concern as in the gathering of agency. This means that each person (actor) assembles social aggregates from a performative definition, not from constative utterances. What arises from a closer engagement with the fragments is this another law of form; it is the force of the lived poetic-didactic, which is the mediation of experience and concept. A reader must find their place in this mediation, and as Hadot's view of spiritual exercise (and dialogue), "we must *let* ourselves be changed, in our point of view, attitudes, and convictions. This means that we must dialogue with ourselves, and hence we must do battle with ourselves."¹⁸ As Hölderlin had Empedocles say, "For me as well this life became a poem."¹⁹ This marks a difficult spiritual exercise to follow as

18) Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 91.

19) Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles*, 50.

an Empedoclean way of life. Indeed, Empedocles' bricolage of poetic, philosophical, and mythic narratives aim at an impossible, eclectic, yet absolute origin of his own discourse as an uncompromised subject. Lévi-Strauss was correct in having observed that, "Mythical thought appears to be an intellectual form of 'bricolage'."²⁰ One should add that it is also the appearance of the living form of bricolage. To support this claim, it is worth adding a few passages from Lévi-Strauss.

The "bricoleur" is adept at performing a large number of tasks ... elements are collected or retained on the principle that "they may always come in handy." ... The elements of mythical thought similarly lie half-way between percept and concepts ... which will always be a compromise between the structure of the instrumental set and that of the project. Further, the "bricoleur" also, and indeed principally, derives his poetry from the fact that he does not confine himself to accomplishment and execution: he "speaks" not only *with* things: as we have already seen, but also through the medium of things: giving an account of his personality and life by the choices he makes between limited possibilities.²¹

This helps frame, and ground, Empedocles' motley and eclectic style, revealing the performance artist that he was, along with his reported stylish couture that reinforced the matter. For a time (and through the history of philosophy), audiences and scholars remained captivated, and shuddered when realizing the possibility of release from stale scholasticism in the "separation of sensuality and understanding," while imagining themselves, if only for moments, where "eros and cognition" could be joined (AT, 331). The role of eros, though not mentioned by term in Empedocles' poem-fragments, is present through the actions of Love (Φιλότης) in struggle with Strife (Νεῖκος). Strife is the self-debt of Love in coming to enjoy and know itself as an urge. Strife is Love's coming to be known in time, and is the construction of temporality itself. Indeed, Strife, as Love's marvelous captive, is the time (and the erotics of temporality), by which the urge comes to know itself. "Love reunites" (B19), as "twice fecund" (B69)

20) Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 21, 17.

21) Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 17–18, 21.

“friendship” (B18), or restating these three fragments as one lyrical phrase, “Love, the firmly united-in-living-nearness is doubled birth.” This moment of the shudder is, in keeping with Love’s power, where “subjectivity stirs without yet being subjectivity [by] the act of being touched by the other” (AT, 331).²² Behold aesthetic apprenticeships in creativity as a practice of spiritual exercises.

All this poetic-didactics, added to the hope of a socio-political application of a cosmic view was also enhanced by Empedocles’ “Aeschylus-actor style,”²³ fusing the telling and the tale to incite his listeners that were mostly comprised of contentious “hyperpolitical, extremely litigious ... calculating ... Agrigentians.”²⁴ Nietzsche was correct to say that Empedocles “demarcated the age of myth, tragedy, and orgiastic [and] democratic statesman, orator, enlightened figure, allegorist and scientific human being.”²⁵ The boundaries of his work contested and joined many frontiers. The legend of his deeds became part of his poem-fragments, and there in the words of Adorno, “Art [and in this case philosophical prose] is what remains after the loss of what was supposed to exercise a magical, and a later cultic, function” (AT, 127). His incantatory virtuosity turned the hopes of spiritual exercise into a drama of martyrdom, where his poem-fragments and his teachings, left “traces of the torture required to carry it out” (AT, 280). Behold the charred remains of the aesthetics, or art as the decay that glows.

Empedocles, the mannerist of Presocratic philosophy, motley and eclectic, was breaking into a realm of the sublime and into creation-as-nature, not by imitating nature, but from adapting meter, genres, and the tone of fragments where his predecessors left nature-like-traces. Creation through such a *maniera* (way) pushes the idea of virtuosity to its limits. In seeking to transcend solipsism, Empedocles found the power in/as nature, where, as in mannerist artworks, he desperately sought to “break the arrogance of his self-positing” performance (AT, 276).²⁶ In Empedocles’

22) See also Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 274–75.

23) Nietzsche, *Rhetoric and Language*, 219.

24) Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles*, 149.

25) Nietzsche, *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, 119. Nietzsche sums up what both Jaeger and Dodds were dividing years later. See Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 146.

26) As Jaspers expressed long ago, “[Empedocles] forgot the boundaries set for man [and infringed the limit in a grandiose manner].” Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers*, 55–56.

case, whether choreographic or not, this became his poetic, political, medical, and prophetic drama of self-immolation.²⁷

How could this arresting Silenian dreamscape have turned Empedocles' listeners, and Pausanias, into imagined trans-subjective actors, practicing a spiritual exercise and pattern for their lives? Did Empedocles' oral deliveries, based on repeated set compositions, paraphrases, and themes, not tend to slip from doctrinally influenced readings into an example of a rhetorical-*cum*-theogonic-ideology? I believe that Empedocles recalled, lived through, and was well aware of the culmination of the social catastrophe of prior thinkers, the Orphic and Pythagoreans mostly, other Presocratics, and his own. Each, with the exception of Parmenides within his blessed Elea, were "ostracized by their communities as being a threat either to the political or the religious orthodoxies of those communities."²⁸

Aphrodite's Bolts of Love and Empedocles' Cosmic Cycle

As part of the aesthetic way, I display three visual renditions, or *graphikē*. Figure 2 is a rather hermetic visualization of an Empedoclean combinatory figure in its initial stages, and a beginning of an Empedoclean memory theater, initiated from the eight letters of the term "life-giving" (ζείδωρος) of fragment B151. Coincidentally, the number eight was the number of Aphrodite, and let us recall Aphrodite's bolts of love mentioned in B87. Ζείδωρος has been translated as "life-giving," "Life-giving Aphrodite," and "life bestowing" (*che dona la vita*, or *avvivatrice*), amongst other rather bland variations.²⁹ Empedocles mentions this term in relation to Hera in B6, as Ηρη τε φερέσβιος (life-giving Hera). I will leave the term as Ζείδωρος, since it is, for my purposes, a place-name, and more of a diazographomenon and syncope.

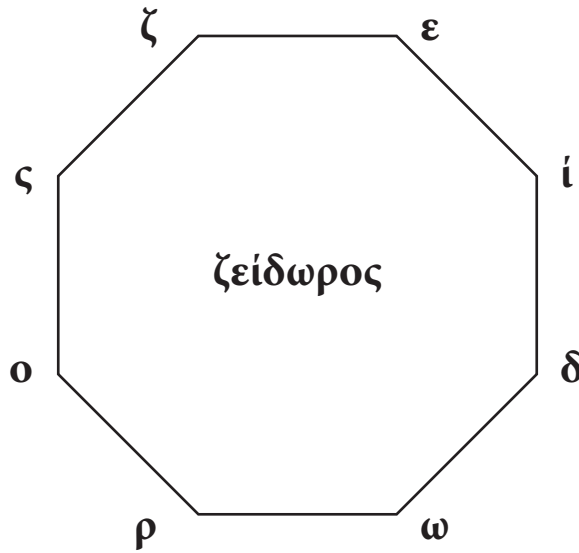
27) "Let the poets have the privilege and license to die [as they please]" (Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 465–66). This gesture is a reconciliation with nature, and again, under Adornian terms, where "Nature is no longer oppressed by spirit, frees itself from the miserable nexus of rank second nature, and subjective sovereignty. Such emancipation would be the return of nature, and it – the counterimage of mere existence – is the sublime" (AT, 197).

28) Hyland, "Aristotle and the Invention of Platonism," 169. See also Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles*, 149.

29) The first translation is from Laks and Most, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 405. The second translation is by McKirahan, in Curd, *A Presocratics Reader*, 92; and the third is by Tonelli e Ramelli, in Tonelli, *Empedocle di Agrigento*, 91.

Graphikē

Hermetic visualization of what an Empedoclean combinatory figure and memory theater would look like from reading fragment B151 (and recalling Aphrodite's bolts of love from B87).



Starting from ζ I heard -ζε, ζάω, ζωός, then with ε, είδος, είδω, είδω, έός, έρος. With ι I heard ίώ, ίδω, with δ, δῶρον, and with ω, ὥρος. In ρ, I heard ρόος, with ο, ὅς, and with σ, σόω. With these shifted signifiers, I combined the Greek terms to read:

The motion towards life alive is to form what is seen and shape what is to see, and to know that it may then devour and consume one's love. Such joy/grief I have seen to be and to exist as a gift, present as the boundary, limit or measure that flows from this and that, and there always preserves and delivers.

This combinatory figure sums up the resonance of the seamless matrix of cosmogonic desire (Love-Strife) in the fragments of Empedocles. Each letter acting as a “bolt[] of love”.

Figure 2

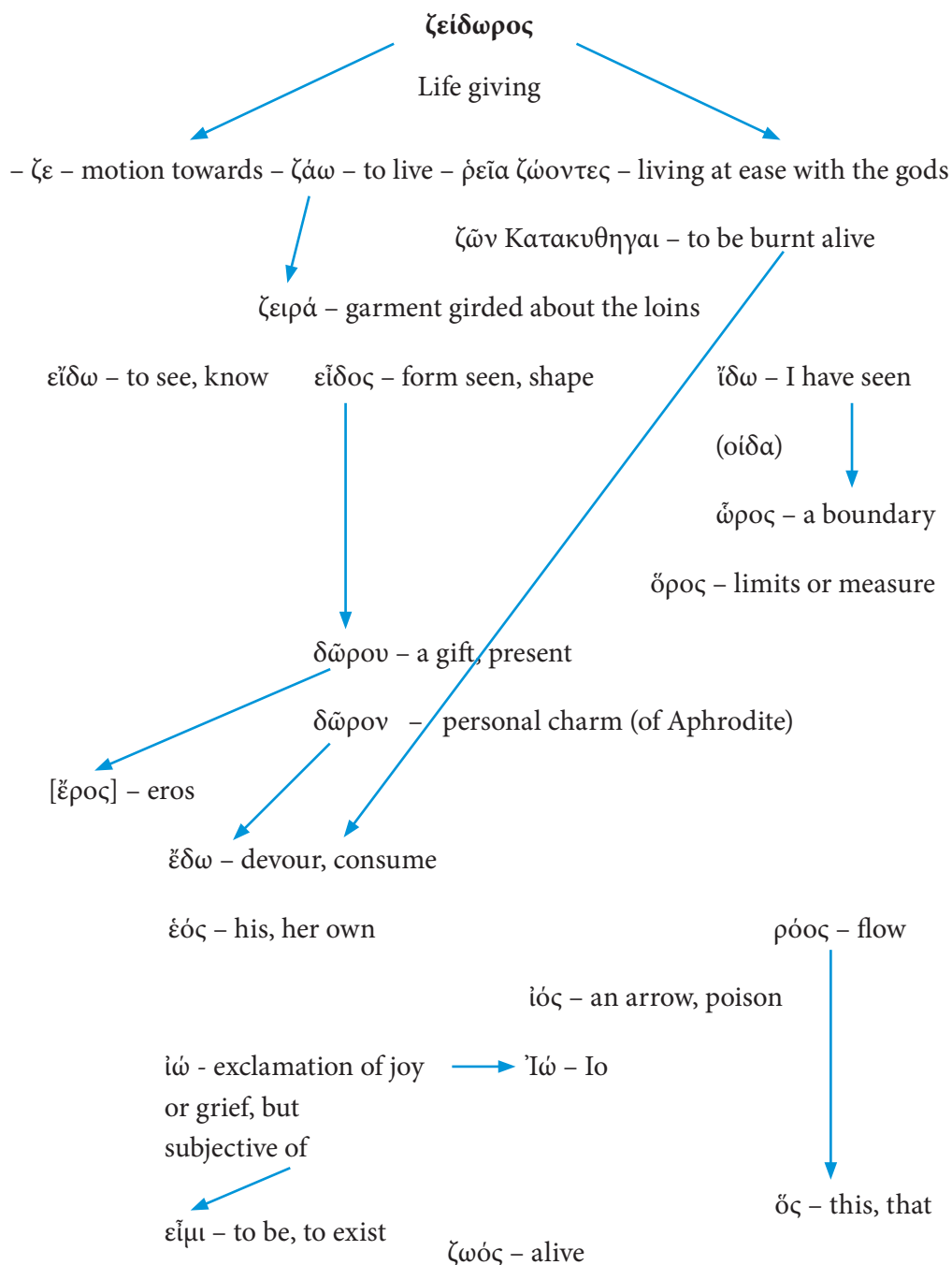
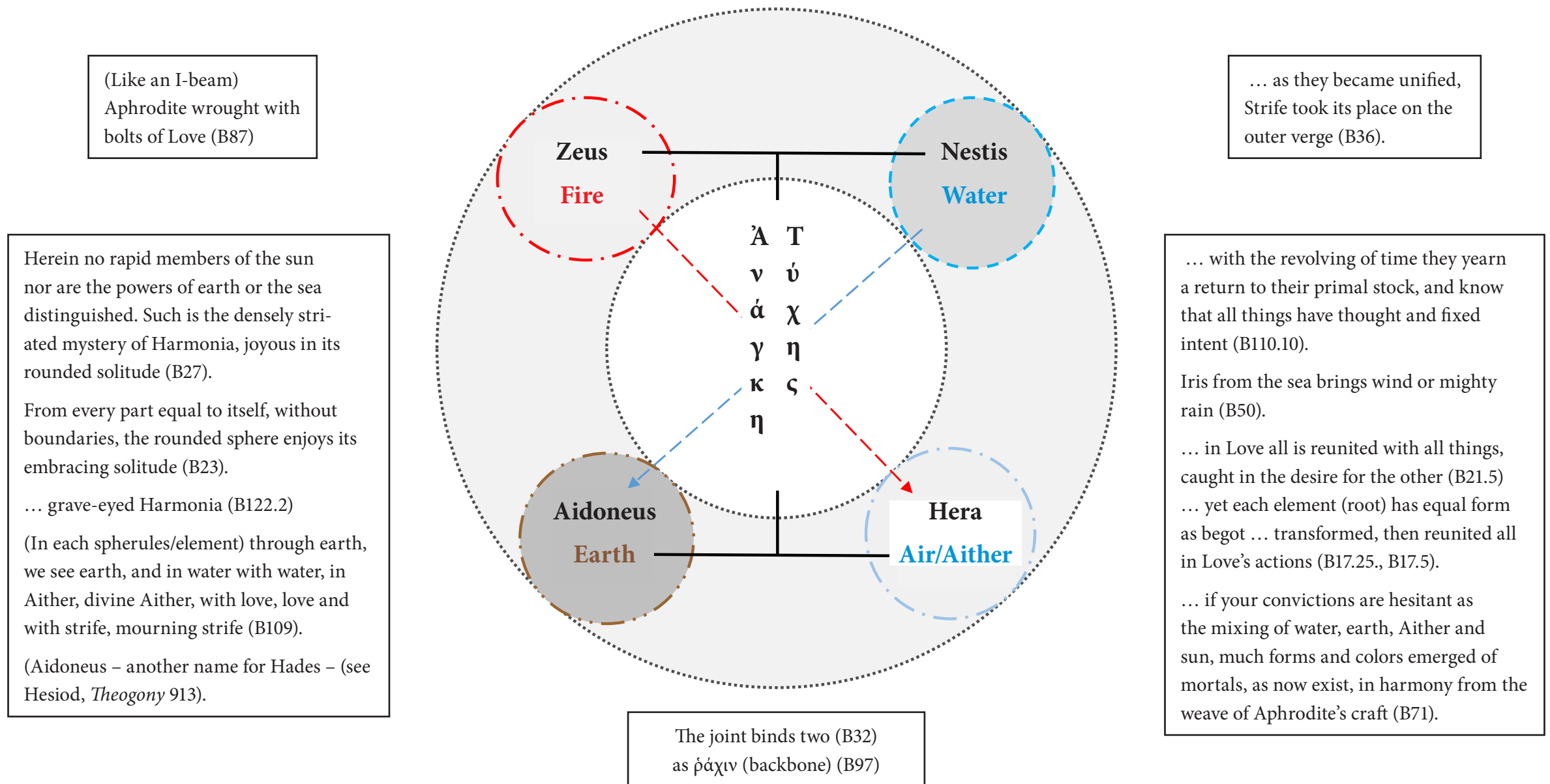


Figure 3



Necessity's oracle, ancient decree of the gods, eternally sealed with ample oaths (B115.1) ... is deplored by love that enchains humans. And such is how it is willed as Chance (τύχη) in all things ... (B103.1).

Figure 4

I am partial to the rendition of “what bestows life,” and “life-giving,” or in Latin and Italian, “*alma*” (fertile richness),³⁰ though in the context of Empedocles’ poem-fragments it is that, and more than just “Aphrodite.” *Zeíδωρος* is that which retains and returns motion and stillness, desire and repulsion, and what consumes, preserves, and delivers. It is desire’s seduction of death and death’s seduction of desire; and it is warning us, “beware of saying that death is opposed to life.”³¹ Here, indeed, we have a *vor*-text of a term, and a finely and tightly embroidered embrace of Love-and-Strife as a seamless balm and rupture. I consider this term-fragment a master signifier, as well as its elusive *objet petit a*.³² My hermetic visualization, in its preliminary stage, is in the spirit of Giordano Bruno’s *De Umbris idearum*, and the memory theater of Giulio Camillo. Figure 3 displays my speculative-poetic rendition, (and touch of playfulness), as a transposition of how I heard the eight letters in *ζεῖδωρος* shift as I followed possible prefixes, suffixes, and terms from the metonymic rapids into a phrase (rendered in Figure 2), that I envisioned as exposing the master signifier of Empedocles’ fragment B151, *ζεῖδωρος*. Of course, this comes with the need and potential of play, steeped in the seriousness of its pedagogical relevance, for openings in interpretive possibilities beyond the hair shirts and straightjackets of previous theoretical capture.

Figure 4 is a preliminary sketch for an animated computer graphic rendition of Empedocles’ cosmic cycle of the four basic physical forms, or “roots,” Necessity, Chance, and Love and Strife, and Fire, Water, Earth, and Air/Ether. My translation of a few surrounding fragments serves as a start to the complexity of the projected animated rendition that would eventually include more fragments. The choice of fragments surrounding the figure support certain terms and relations, placed at the side of those terms or elements. An I-beam (or backbone) links the four elements, and that beam is wrought by Necessity (*ἀνάγκη*) and Chance (*Τύχη*). There are vectors of the mixing of each element (also named by their mythological names). As it stands, figure 4 is a snapshot of the torus (or perhaps hypersphere, but not a sphere), where

30) It is instructive and extraordinary to see this in how Lucretius posits “alma Venus” (nurturing Venus) throughout *De Rerum Natura*, beginning at 1.2 through 1.40, and then 1.228, 2.173, 437, 3.776, 4.1037–1287, and 5.737, 848, 897, and 1017. It is as if Lucretius was peering through Empedocles’ cosmography, nature cycles, and evolutionary vision, whom he praised as divine; see *De Rerum Natura* 1.716–733.

31) Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Book Three, §109, p. 168.

32) Lacan, *Television*, 72.

each root element may couple, mix more widely, or remain to itself, generating various torus shapes. Those that pine and gawk in awe for a clearly defined *Sphairos* (sphere), forget that its lack of boundaries equates to the topology of a torus, appropriately “without confine/edges” (πάμπαν ἀπείρων), if one indeed wishes to follow the poem-fragments B27, and B28 of Empedocles in earnest. As part of the cosmic cycle, and in the words of Giorgio Colli,

The knower can therefore come to be a small *Sphairos*, a microcosm of truth. Yet this is not a given total coincidence with the *Sphairos* and the immortal god, because the *Sphairos* annuls in itself the entire world and all that comprehends it, while instead philosophers have within them, the *Sphairos*, and outside of them, the world prey to *Neikos* ... and the instability of mortality.³³

One should recall what the Hippocratic treatise, *On Ancient Medicine*, once expressed: “All that has been said or written on nature [*peri physeōs*] by some scholar or doctor is less relevant to the art of medicine than to the art of painting [*graphikē*].”³⁴ Yet, this criticism does not preclude what makes up stages, or life-patterns of spiritual exercise – *askēsis*, or philosophy as a way of life, and from there, I turn to a provocative fragment of Empedocles.

As when painters color votive tablets
each expert in their cunning art
taking many-colored pigment by hand
and mixing them in harmony,
some more, some less
producing images verisimilar of all things

33) Colli, *Empedocle*, 37–38. A glance at Martin and Primavesi, *L'Empédocle de Strasbourg*, 96, 345–47, seems to be a throwback to the circle (and two worlds), problematizing the complexity of the *Sphairos*. The *Sphairos* is actually a torus, where there are no confines, or periphery, and no expansion. Developing this would require a separate detailed study to fully articulate and analyze, by revisiting the 80 lines of the papyrus called *P. Strasb. gr. Inv. 1665–1666*. Perhaps one should settle on the *Sphairos* as being a hypersphere.

34) Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*, 19–20.

creating trees, men, women, beasts, birds, fish in water, and long-lived honored gods.

Let no deception steer your mind that anything other
than this is the origin and source of all mortal things
and know by hearing it from the words of a god. (B23)

The process of mastering and then representing what Empedocles compares to painters and poets who render through color and words, dovetails the aesthetic dimension and apprenticeships in the arts, with the same imaginative force and discipline as apprenticeships required for spiritual exercises.³⁵ These are commutative processes, which even as imagined possibilities are not excluded from the stories and ways of one's life.

Such exercises and practices guide, transform, and re-form the self toward a mastery of a wider view, even if by simply repeating, rewriting, or drawing something heard, read, or seen. This is where the apprenticeship in aesthetics contributes to an *ēthos* (ἦθος), or character formed as spiritual exercise.³⁶ In turn, this forms the *daimōn* of Empedocles' moral-cosmic principle in transforming ourselves (see fragments B110.5–6, B115.5). Here, again we face the moment of the shudder, of Love's power, where "subjectivity stirs without yet being subjectivity [by] the act of being touched by the other" (AT, 331).³⁷ Strife ignites this power of difference. The term *ζείδωρος* contains a hermetic silence of the term Eros (Ἔρως), as the cut of alterity and the powerful "*vor*" (facing) of Empedocles' poem-fragments, from the striated richness of Nature (Φύσις). Love projects Strife as "something thrown forward to someone" (*vorwerfen*), and by facing it their conjoined act (complementarity), initiates the call of "possibility as possibility," or a folding again upon itself as measured "reproach." Strife is Love known in time, and is the construction of temporality (and layered temporalities). Strife is that *vor*-text of differences: a continuous facing and

35) Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*, 208, 21. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 82–89. See also Kramer, *Intercultural Modes of Philosophy*, 196–205, 293–99.

36) This is an example of a "perceptive, lived relationship with the earth" and being "creature on one star among the other stars" through an aesthetic mode. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 254–56. See also Kramer *Intercultural Modes of Philosophy*, 197–203.

37) Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 274–75.

mixing with Love where directions and their positions exchange as a choreographed dance (see B35.4). The richness and patterning of the poem-fragments of Empedocles partake in this kind of action. It is where re-sequencing of the fragments requires an ear and eye for the living rhythm contained therein.

Barely hidden in all this is the reverberation of Heraclitus' "Human character is one's *daimōn*" (ἥθος ἀνθρώπου δαίμων – B119). It takes but a small step to link this view of an individual *ethos* with Nature's Necessity, and where Nature, that loves to hide and be sought, is the embrace one's own nature and character (hidden or exposed) as part of a collective we, contributing to the recurring cycle of their/there-Nature. See B115 for Empedocles' mention of the "oracle of Necessity ... sealed by broad oaths" where those that do not uphold it (or play along), will suffer exile. In B116, we find how Love detests the understanding of Necessity from the all-too-human erroneous presupposition that Strife is evitable, thus nullifying the "possibility as possibility" of what desires, consumes repulsion, overcomes reproach, and preserves and delivers. Fragment B59 shows us the inmixing force of Love-Strife, each as the other's marvelous captive, each nested-entrained processes. To prepare us for this transition-as-inmixing of the aesthetic and the spiritual exercise, a nod again to Adorno will prove helpful.

Even in its congealed, objectified state, [an artwork] utters the process contained within it... To experience or co-enact a work would then mean no more or less than co-enacting in the work all these aspects of the force field which the work constitutes, which it simultaneously is and exceeds. In that sense, once can say that aesthetic experience itself is really a spiritual experience, even though this spiritual experience must fall short of the work's essence if it is not the most intense and precise experience of its sensual attributes."³⁸

✱ ✱ ✱

We now transition from the aesthetic to the spiritual exercise way, firmly upon the shoulders of Pierre Hadot, and find how this vision appears as a dream, a dream written

38) Adorno, *Aesthetics* 1958/59, 141.

and read, in this case, by Empedocles to his fellow citizens, counting as a basic exercise in expanding horizons above petty human concerns. This grand view from above, so tied to the present moment, is what Empedocles' poetry performs in a language-perceiving writing as painting (*graphikē*) beyond the purely self-centered, self-reflective, remorseful gaze, that resides in his struggle as a whisperer of the whirling cosmos.³⁹ In the words of Paul Klee, "Art no longer imitates things; it makes things visible."⁴⁰ What is made visible in Empedocles is "the artistic wisdom of that which dwell in the Whole [where] the soul's artistic desire now commences because overcoming the contrarily striving forces [Strife], gently and gradually pleases it."⁴¹ Here we have an arch-didactic lesson in the fundamental phenomenon of Love and Strife itself. Philosophy, born from song, is the wonder of the how pleasure emerges from struggle.

A Spiritual Exercise Way

Spiritual exercise conjoined with the aesthetic, guides us to re-sequence (re-order) the fragments of Empedocles, working from a mix of myth, natural sciences, and poetry.⁴² Such a practice is a non-reductive pan-didacticism of thought and matter that feels, enjoys, and suffers (see B107). As a poetic story arranged with consistency, the fragments expose, focus, and enlarge aspects of human life by calling interlocutors into question from living their struggle to pleasure. Empedocles describes this in fragment B110, and in my translation, along with its properly re-sequenced addendum, B132.

For in relaying upon your steadfast and densely striated thoughts,
when contemplating with a pure disposition of spirit,
these teachings will be near you for all eternity
... growing according to a person's nature. (B110.1–3, 5)

39) *Graphein* (γράφειν) means both "to write" and "to paint." See Hadot, *Don't Forget to Live*, 48, 65, 76, and 94.

40) See Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 256.

41) Schelling, *The Ages of the World* [1815], 56 and 58.

42) For an insightful position on the fictive stability of myth and its relation to truth, whether religious, folkloric, or philosophical, see Lacan, *The Object Relation*, 245–47.

Happy is he, who has acquired these riches of divine recall/thought,
while unhappy is he who cultivates obscure beliefs of the gods. (B132)

This signals a teaching of *askēsis* through ecstatic contemplation (ἐποπτεύσεις) of what Empedocles sees as the four basic physical forms, or “roots,” and Love and Strife where, through training, a “correct disposition of spirit” (B110. 2) is possible “for all time” (δι’ αἰῶνος). This is because individuals, as Nature, are composed and entrained as effluences of these roots, justly or unjustly proportioned, and in degrees, immortal. The scholarship of Giorgio Colli helps support this claim about practice of contemplation, due to the use of the mystical term *epopteuseis* (spiritual disposition) of B110.2 in union with the term *paresontai* (purified attention) (B110.3), that signals a union with the contemplated object.⁴³ The search for and practice of proportion (being-thinking), counts as a spiritual exercise or *Katharmoi* (purification), orienting and forming theoretical and practical levels of transformation and degrees of immortality in and as relations of persons, nature, world, and cosmos. Indeed, this is an extreme example of an apprenticeship, and being guided as an apprentice, where harmony exists in relation to what was before and after, as what was above and below, as an ordering that dignified the cosmos (micro and macro), rather than a tattered genealogy, ourselves, or the starry skies, as an overwhelming and collective mess. In Empedocles’ words, “All things feel and have their share of thought” (πάντα γὰρ ἴσθι φρόνησιν ἔχειν καὶ νόματος αἴσαν) (B110.10). Bignone notices the difficulty of this expression, seemingly reserved for the elements, though grants Empedocles an extension for a wider understanding of naturalism.⁴⁴ Bignone extends this reading to persons, by pointing out that, “*epoptēs* è l’iniziato stesso, *μελέται* indica non solo *cure*, ma anche *pratiche* e *l’asceti* religiosa,”⁴⁵ (the watcher [*epoptēs*] is the initiated, [and] *μελέται* indicates not only *cures*, but also *practices* and religious *askēsis*.) In Bignone’s translation of B110.1–2 we read, “Poiché, se poggiando sui tuoi fitti ricordi, / piamente, con pure pratiche, le contemplerai,” (After leaning upon your dense [striated] memories, reverently in pure practice, you will contemplate them). Herein we sense Empedocles’ version of a living and breathing

43) Colli, *Empedocle*, 40–41, see 37–39.

44) Bignone, *Empedocle*, 480.

45) *Ibid.*, 481.

complementarity of being-and-thinking, a zone of strange locality where the watcher/initiated (*epoptēs*) practices the entangled threads of *phronēsis* and *noēma*.

One should add that in both spiritual exercises and aesthetic apprenticeships there are levels of “degrees of immortality” in the mention of “reverently pure practice.” These levels of self-mastery (*enkrateia*), as Empedocles hoped for, at least with Pausanias, are a “mutually reinforced *enkrateia* of philosophical community ... [of] an adherent’s activity.”⁴⁶ Such is how, later on and according to Hadot, “the Socratic dialogue turns out to be a kind of communal spiritual exercise.”⁴⁷ Though superbly performative, surrounded by audiences by taking philosophy into the streets, while joining parts of previous theories for practical outcomes, Empedocles was not as fortunate with the community of his fellow Sicilians. Perhaps he did not allow enough participation or interlocutors (pace Pausanias), maintaining instead a measured distance by his sheer presence, appearing more standoffish than otherworldly. As Diogenes Laertius noted, his abundant means, donning a purple robe held in place by a golden girdle, bronze sandals, and a Delphic laurel-wreath upon his head while gazing from a grave demeanor was more theatrical-recitation than communally approachable and dialogic. Even his student, Gorgias (a successful apprentice), presented himself in like manner for his *agōn*-oriented oratory performances. In the words of a fellow Sicilian, Domenico Scinà, “The circumstances of the times, instead of favoring, vigorously opposed [Empedocles’] designs and the disposition of his soul” (*Le circostanze de’ tempi, in vece di favorire, gagliardamente opponeansi a suoi disegni, e alle disposizioni dell’animo suo*).⁴⁸ One should not be too confused about the circumstances of opposition of those times, for they endure on the island, to this day.

Hadot Inspired Quaternary

Figure 5 presents my second quaternary inspired by and closely following Hadot’s 2023 text, *Don’t Forget to Live: Goethe and the Tradition of Spiritual Exercises*.⁴⁹ Each stage

46) See Kramer, *Intercultural Modes of Philosophy*, 197, and Chapter 1.

47) Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 90.

48) Scinà, *Memorie sulla vita e filosofia d’Empedocle*, 84.

49) Hadot, *Don’t Forget to Live*, see Chapters 1 through 4.

is a corner, along with what I see as a few of Empedocles' corresponding fragments. The vectors are as follows: between Hope and The View from Above there is a steady complementarity. Due to this, Hope feeds Concentration on the Present Instant, as does The View from Above, whereas Hope can also enrich the former, by its combination to saying "Yes to Life and World."

I consider the four stages of Hadot as a framework for the conjoined aesthetic way and the spiritual exercise way. Nested within each of Hadot's stages, I have placed a selection of Empedocles' fragments, or fragment lines, with my translation and re-sequencing (re-ordering). These stages and examples serve to guide to a larger project involving an overall re-translating and re-sequencing (re-ordering) of the extant fragments. In what follows, and on Figure 5, for ease of referencing, I use the established corresponding B numbers. As far as I am presently aware, Hadot did not analyze Empedocles' poems in any detail. I propose to show passages from Empedocles' poem-fragments, both from the *Katharmoi* and *Physiká* that I consider as one: an Empedoclean way of life indicating instructions for spiritual exercises.

Spiritual Exercise Quaternary

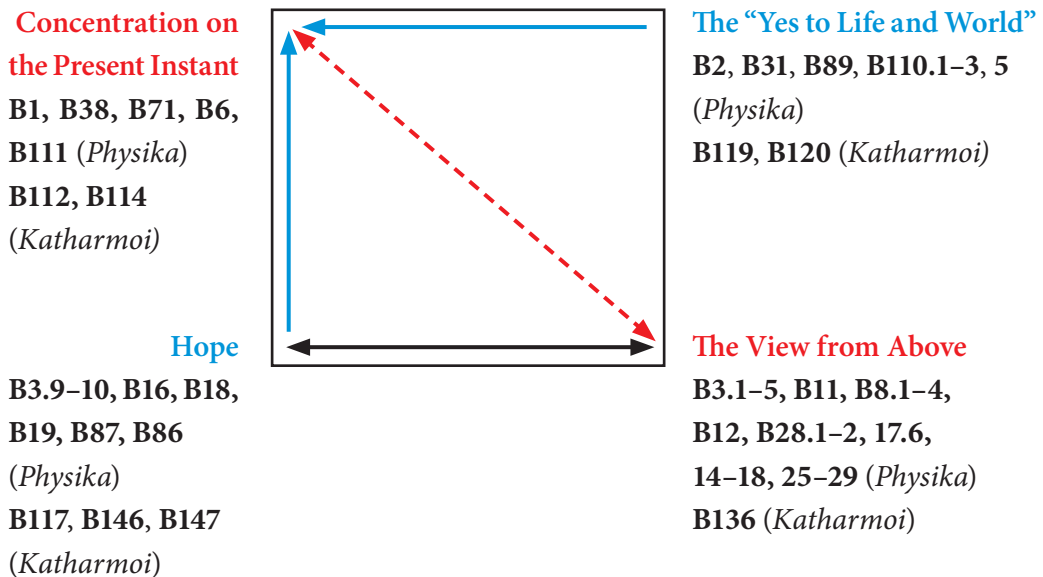


Figure 5

1. Concentration on the present instant – (living dialogue).⁵⁰

In Hadot's apt references, this stage is best seen in Pittacus's pronouncement, that is, "do the present well,"⁵¹ in Antiphon's "live the present life,"⁵² and later still, in Marcus Aurelius's "I say to the universe: I love along with you."⁵³ This stage is about the shudder, amazement, and gratitude found while living within and surrounded by present instances. One must travel ahead to Philo of Alexandria to experience a regime of a spiritual exercise that takes this into account, and that though somewhat hidden, can be seen through in the existing though scattered form of the poem-fragments of Empedocles. This first stage counts as a first exercise from Empedocles' text, and that is, the incitement for an interlocutor to listen to or read in meditative dialogue.⁵⁴ As Hadot stated, the life-blood of the "communitary engagement," "practice in groups," and "common effort" was alive in ancient philosophy.⁵⁵ While my corresponding promissory view of a reordering of the fragments at this stage contains only a limited number of the fragments of Empedocles, each exemplify what this first stage of spiritual exercise would resemble as the concentration on the present instant, or living dialogue. These are, B1, B38, B71, B6, B111 from *Physiká*, and B112, B114 from *Katharmoi*.

And you, Pausanias, listen, son of the valiant Anchites. (B1)

Take courage, I shall first speak to you of the origins ...
from where all is manifested, of what we now see,
earth, the sea, and many waves, moist air
and the Titan eternal Aither enclosing all things in a circle. (B38)

50) See Hadot, *Don't Forget to Live*, xvii, and 15–25. See also Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 21–237, and Hadot, *The Present Alone is Our Happiness*, 162–75.

51) Diogenes Laertius. In Hadot, *Don't Forget to Live*, 15, 152n.52.

52) Antiphon, D53, D48. In Hadot, *Don't Forget to Live*, 15, 152n.53.

53) Marcus Aurelius, *Writing for Himself*. In Hadot, *Don't Forget to Live*, 25, 154n.85.

54) See Kramer, *Intercultural Modes of Philosophy*, 200–202.

55) See Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 84–88, 105, and 274.

If you are not convinced by these arguments, and your faith vacillates,
in how the mixing of water, earth, Aither and sun
there were born many forms and colors of mortal beings,
as many as now exist, in harmony from Aphrodite's work. (B71)

Learn then firstly of the four roots of all things:
resplendent Zeus and Hera that give life, and Adonius, and Nêstis
who moistens with her tears the mortal fountain. (B6)

You will learn all the remedies against ills and old age,
Because, for you alone [Pausanias] I desire to complete these teachings.
(B111)

O friends, dwelling on the sacred rocks near blond Acragas, upon a high
citadel,
you who cultivate excellence in governing, care for strangers, and are
far from evil,
hail! (B112)

Friends, I know the truth in the words I will speak;
yet, correct persuasion [*peithos*] will be assaulted by the human mind's
unending assent through its contrasting search. (B114)

2. The view from above (detaching from our individual partial viewpoint).⁵⁶

This stage comprises of exercises in productive imagination, as apprenticeships in creativity from standing on the shoulders of giants. Consider here Epicurus's recommendation, "Though mortal by nature, reason to the eternity of things."⁵⁷ Hadot equates

56) See Hadot, *Don't Forget to Live*, 46–54. See also Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 238–50; and Hadot, *The Present Alone is Our Happiness*, 167–70.

57) *Vatican Sentences*, § 10. See Hadot, *Don't Forget to Live*, 65, 76; and Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, 206–207.

this stage to the “liberation brought by true poetry ... which detaches us from terrestrial, egoistic preoccupations, [to instead] reconstitute our life in this world within the vast perspective of the All.”⁵⁸ This vision makes up the sustained tone of Empedocles’ lessons in the relation of nature’s divine ordering. This view is also, as Hadot mentions, found in Cicero’s *Dream of Scipio*, and in Lucian’s *Icaromenippus*, and *Charon*, each revealing the human-all-too-human pettiness and foolish disputes in contrast to the patterned immensity and order of the cosmos. Indeed then, “To view things from above is to look at them from the perspective [and exercise] of death.”⁵⁹ “As my most intimate nature teaches me, all that is necessary, viewed from above and in the sense of a great economy, is also the most advantageous in itself – not only must we bear it, we must love it ... *Amor fati*.”⁶⁰ The corresponding selected fragments from Empedocles to exemplify this view in a promissory glimpse, would be B3.1–5, B11, B8.1–4, B12, B28.1–2, B17.1–6, 14–18, 26–29 from *Physiká*, and B136 from *Katharmoi*.

Oh gods, distance my tongue,
from their maddened discourses and make a pure source
emerge from my words. To you,
most desired white-armed virgin Muse
my invocation is: bring ephemeral creatures of a day
what is fair for them to hear, by guiding the chariot of piety (B3.1–5)

The foolishly uninitiated do not toil in deepest thought
when expecting there is birth from what once was not
or that something perishes and is totally destroyed. (B11)

Even more I will say: there is no birth
for any single mortal thing, nor does the confines of death destroy them,
there is only mixing and separation
and of the mixed, origins were only names given by humans. (B8.1–4)

58) Hadot, *Don't Forget to Live*, 65. See Kramer and Herstein, “Creative Error Genealogy,” 369–70.

59) Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, 206–7.

60) Nietzsche, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, Epilogo § 1, 148.

There cannot be birth from what is not, and impossible that
what is, is destroyed completely, it will always be
there where each entity, from time to time, finds itself as a base. (B12.1–3)

Yet from each part, it equals itself, everywhere without boundary,
the rounded sphere enjoys its surrounding solitude. (B28.1–2)

Doubling what I have spoken, the One emerges from many so to be one,
and then dividing, so that from One there comes to be many,
doubled as well is mortal human birth, doubled is death;
one generating and destroying the union of all things, the other
emerging when again undone, it takes in what surrounds itself.
This never ends, these things are perpetually transmuted ... (B17.1–6)

...

Listen to my tale, as knowledge that nurtures the mind
and as I told before, announcing the boundaries of my speech,
doubling what was said: now the One emerges from many, so to be one,
then dividing, so that from One there comes to be many,
Fire, and Water, and Earth and the immense heights of Air ... (B17.14–18)

...

But, now listen to the following most truthful part of my tale. The elements
are of equal form, and of contemporaneous birth,
each with their own qualities and temperaments
and they dominate in turn through the circling of time (B17. 26–29)

Will you not end massacres that carry such abysmal repercussions?
You who devour each other from indifference in knowing. (B136)

3. Hope (*Elpis*).⁶¹

This stage is about the indomitable audacity of the human spirit in facing the order of Necessity (*Ανάγκη*). (See B115, 116). The corresponding selected fragments of Empedocles would be B3.9–10, B16, B18, B19, B87, B86 from *Physiká*, and B117, B146, B147 from *Katharmoi*.

Now, examine each thing with every resource,
as each reveals its evidence, and do not lend faith
to sight more than hearing, nor to the echoing ear
... do not dismiss trust
to other resources where a passage may open
of immediate knowing, grasping each thing
as it manifests. (B3.9–10)

As things were before, so they will be,
neither will the infinite eternal be emptied of this. (B16)

Friendship [is]... . (B18)

... Love that binds. (B19)

[From] Aphrodite's steadfast bolts of love. (B87)

Aphrodite also forged the roots as cones of sleepless eyes. (B86)

I too was once a boy, a girl,
A bush, a bird, and a mute fish flipping about out of the water. (B117)

Ultimately they all become prophets, bards, physicians
and leaders for humankind on earth;
and from these the gods blossom from excellent honors. (B146)
Sharing hearth and meals with other immortals,
detached from human suffering, and indestructible. (B147)

61) See Hadot, *Don't Forget to Live*, 116–125.

4. The “Yes to Life and the World.”⁶²

This stage is about the joy in existing, of being in the world, of saying “yes” to each unique moment and thus to all eternity.

Suppose we say yes to a single unique instant: we will thereby have said yes not only to ourselves, but to all of existence. For nothing is for itself, either in ourselves, or in things. And if, even once, happiness has made our soul vibrate and resonate like a musical string, all the eternities were necessary to create the conditions for this Unique vent, and all eternity has been approved, redeemed, justified, affirmed, in that unique instant in which we have said yes.⁶³

The corresponding selected fragments of Empedocles for this stage would be B2, B31, B89, B110.1–3, 5, from *Physiká*, and B119, B120 from *Katharmoi*.

Difficult indeed it is for humans
to discern these things, to hear and intuitively grasp.
Yet, you, [Pausanias] who have found refuge here,
Will know them, as the human mind has never been raised so on high.
(B2.5–8)

Each of the limbs of god tremble, one, then another. (B31)

... [mere] effluences are what exist in all things that emerge. (B89)

For in relaying upon your steadfast and densely striated thoughts,
when contemplating with a pure disposition of spirit,
these teachings will be near you for all eternity
... growing according to a person’s nature. (B110.1–3, 5)

From what ordinance, from what heights of joy ... (B119)

... did we end up under this vast blanketed grotto[?] (B120)

62) See Hadot, *Don’t Forget to Live*, 126–42.

63) Nietzsche, *Nachlaß*, 307–308.

The Deaths of Empedocles

My final graph, as Figure 6, represents the deaths of Empedocles and, in my estimation, as the legends representing and reverberating from his visions of the four roots.⁶⁴ This figure contains three fields. The central field represents the four Empedoclean elements (Fire, Water Earth, Air/Ether). The next field represents how these elements could have influenced how Empedocles died, either leaping into Mt. Etna (fire), drowning (water), with a broken hip by falling to the ground (earth), or vanishing (air/ether). The final larger field are Empedoclean personas as mentioned throughout his fragments, thus (prophet, poet, physician, and politician). Life becomes art here, and art of performative strategies, life.

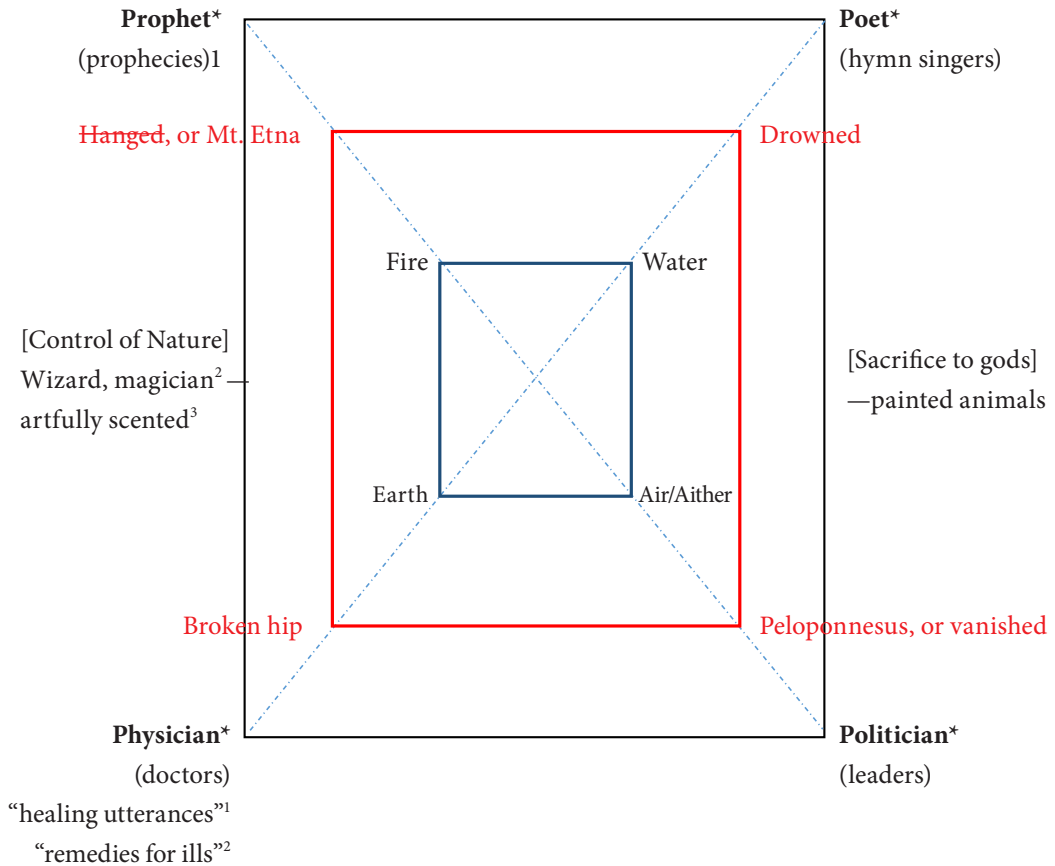
Whether living a short life as “ephemeral beings” (ἐστὶν ἐφημερίοισιν, B3.4), or a “long life” (δολιχαίωνες, B21.12, B23.8), transformations of the self from apprenticeships in aesthetic practices and spiritual exercise occur, and remain recurrences within and around the mortal fountain (κρούνωμα βρότειον, B6). Any “view from above,” and any “hope” is built up from saying “Yes to [this] life and [this] world,” while focused “on the present moment,” onto death. This is the underlying tone of Empedocles’ call for apprenticeships through Love and/as Strife.

The object of individual love, is from the start, the image of the universe that is presented for the measureless consumption of the subject standing before it. This object is itself consumption exerting its pull, and what the object offers to the subject who loves it is to open itself to the universe and to no longer differentiate itself from the universe. In the fixation of love there is no longer any distance between an indistinct but purely concrete totality of what is universally real and the object of this love: the beloved *in* love is always the universe itself.⁶⁵

64) While this resonates as life imitating art, it is also how my visual representation expanded upon a study by Chitwood, “The Death of Empedocles.” I felt it was a proper tribute to a brilliant and creative classicist (1953–2012), and an enticing vision of how, in some occasions, shared interests, lives, and legends, imitate, blend, or are transformed into or from art.

65) Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, 161.

Life imitating Art?
Quaternary of Empedocles's Four Deaths



* = from B146. 1 = from B112. 2 = from B111. 3 = from fragment B128.

Demetrius of Troezen maliciously said Empedocles died by hanging himself. Diogenes Laertius believed that he leaped into Etna. Telauges believed Empedocles drowned (see B117, 21). Favorinus thought he died from a broken hip or leg, riding to Messina. Timaeus said he disappeared (exiled) in the Peloponnesus (see B118, 119) while Heraclides said he disappeared into thin air.

Figure 6

A melancholic strain of nature flows through the fragments of Empedocles from one of the basic physical forms of all things, and that is *Nēstis*, “who moistens with her tears the mortal fountain” (B6), emerging conjoined from how the “birth of humans [were] from many tears” (B62). This mortal fountain is our “mortal mind” (*βροτεῖη μῆτις*, B2.8–9), as it strives to realize the will of love. In the momentary glances of realization, there is the shimmering joy of an ever be-stilled *Nunc stans* through the rich shards of mnemonic recall (*πραπίδων*) of the “breath/wealth of divine thought” (B132). It is in this way that Empedocles’ poem-fragments come to life, through the living praxis of an aesthetics of existence and spiritual exercise, initiating while tempering us in revealing our own impeding drama while part of the gifting spaces of self-transformation.

The gifting space of self-transformation reside and reverberate from landscapes of productive imagination. Within such a landscape, one may slacken the network of instrumental reason, as I have attempted to do in this study on Empedocles, inspired through the potential of PWL practices. A comprehensive (though not totalizing) reading of the history of philosophy must face the challenge to return, and reread the Presocratics as they lived, that is as practical, performative teachers of ways of living as part of PWL’s cartographic and hermeneutic project of the arts of living seen across philosophy’s history. It is a challenge worth taking, and one that comes with the need and potential of play, steeped in the seriousness of its pedagogical relevance, as are games when collectively participated in their transformative modes. I sought for this in what I wrote and drew in approaching Empedocles. Perhaps this lends the promise of interpretative fulfillment, a kind daemon of a metaphysics of childhood where, “The unreality of games gives notice that reality is not yet real [and is an] unconscious rehearsal [exercises] for the right life [*Sie sind bewußtlose Übungen zum richtigen Leben*].”⁶⁶

Such imaginative spaces of life-changing potential reside in Empedocles’ poem-fragments, a hybrid of the social and political life in his native soil, eclectic heir to aspects of Parmenidean and Pythagorean philosophical teachings, as well as a wandering philosopher. His drama beckons our drama from engaging in, reflecting upon, and re-sequencing and translating the poems’ performative *paideia*, in dialogue

66) Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 228, §146.

with Empedocles and ourselves. Difficult is the spiritual exercise that loosens the established doctrinal coils surrounding imaginative spaces, so to silence the chorus of use-value oriented readings ringing in one's ear. Rarer still is to live the mediation of experience and concept. In Hadot's view of spiritual exercise (and dialogue), "We must *let* ourselves be changed, in our point of view, attitudes, and convictions. This means that we must dialogue with ourselves, and hence we must do battle with ourselves."⁶⁷ This is also, as Foucault would have it, where "the need for a spiritual guide is, as it were, structural."⁶⁸

Spaces for this possibility of guidance are able to emerge from the practices of PWL, where scholarly apprenticeships, as apprenticeships in the arts, are about not only learning and the practice of techniques, but also more importantly, the simultaneous life study of one's mentors through following and being formed by the everyday example of their way of living. This fuses the teaching, the telling, and the tale as learning's lasting romance, where we come to know ourselves and others as transformative possibilities.⁶⁹ The potential of the PWL project, as I envision it, and from this introduction to a rereading Empedocles' fragments, is the ability to work not only in a hermeneutics of con-versions, but of transposition of theoretical stills into moving images of practices, and ultimately as a teaching of what is still alive in philosophy as a way of life.

67) Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 91.

68) Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 398. See also 137 and 163.

69) An outstanding study of transformative possibilities from the perspective and practice of philosophy as a way of life from a sweeping historical grasp is in Kramer, *Intercultural Modes of Philosophy*. Kramer's study is foundational for the budding PWL cartography of different arts of living throughout Western and Eastern philosophy. As part of Kramer's study, there is a projected volume two on "philosophical wanderers," and a volume three, on the "structure of systematic philosophical inquiry both for creator and audience." Another enticing volume of collected essays in this spirit and vision of philosophy as a way of life is *Hadot and Foucault on Ancient Philosophy*, edited by Faustino and Telo. I was privy to Kramer and Herstein's chapter, yet the full text arrived after composing this present study on Empedocles. There is no doubt my study would have benefited from the assemblage of scholars, that mark what distinguishes aspects of philosophy as a way of life in a reading of ancient philosophy.

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