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Die Entstehung der Welt. Studien zum Straßburger Empedokles-Papyrus

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(*Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte*, 142.)

This is a study of Empedocles in light of the Strasbourg papyrus of Empedocles, *P. Strasb. gr.* Inv. 1665–1666, first published in 1999. The study is a revised version of the author's thesis, defended in 2018. Although Wellmann, henceforth W., has some textual suggestions to offer and prints his text of the new material in chapter 9, his main goal is not so much to re-edit the text as to offer a re-thinking of various older debates in light of this new evidence, as well as to propose his own interpretations of the new passages which have only begun to be discussed. W.'s overall thesis can be most succinctly described as the latest version of the case for the non-traditional or asymmetrical interpretation of Empedocles' cosmic cycle. In particular, he is out to show that the new papyrus evidence, which some have claimed confirms the traditional view, does not in fact do so.

Before turning to the contents it will be useful for those not already familiar with the subject to introduce Empedocles briefly, and then to say a few words about the papyrus. Working in the wake of Parmenides' critique of change, Empedocles advanced a doctrine of four eternal elements (earth, water, air, and fire) whose interactions occur under the alternating influence of two psychological-cosmic powers, Love and Strife. Under Love the elements fuse together into larger mixtures or bodies, while under Strife they pull apart. These six principles underlie the world and all of its inhabitants. At one point Love completely subsumes the elements into a single unified being, a god that Empedocles calls the *Sphairos*. This unity comes to an end when Strife reasserts itself, and the elements begin to go their separate ways. In our world both powers are present and active. This alternation is known as Empedocles' cosmic cycle, but as we will see below, the exact sway of Love and Strife is debated. Although the majority of our fragments are cited from a work entitled *On Nature*, some sources also quote from a poem entitled the *Purifications*, in which Empedocles discloses that he is a god in exile from the company of the 'blessed' (see Diels-Kranz fragments B 112 and B 115). The relation, if any, between these two sides

of Empedocles' thoughts is the object of a fundamental, long-standing debate. Despite the occurrence of two titles, some scholars (including this reviewer) think it more likely that all of the fragments go back to a single original work. But W. is a two-works man.

The papyrus, in a nicely legible book-hand from the first century CE, consists of four major 'ensembles' or sections, **a**, **b**, **c**, **d** assembled from smaller pieces, with a few smaller sections, **e** to **k**. Of these, sections **a** and **c** overlap with extant fragments from Empedocles' *On Nature* known to us from Simplicius, making the identification of the text certain. The two biggest revelations from the papyrus are the following. 1) In section **d**, Empedocles interrupts an account of the origin of life to lament his sins of meat-eating. This does not instantly collapse the two works into one, but it does show, conclusively, that the *On Nature* also dealt with religion and reincarnation lore (but see W.'s reading of this material below) 2) Section **a**, the largest, which overlaps with the end of the 35-line Diels-Kranz fragment B 17 and continues it for a further 34 lines, contains a stichometric mark in the margin, a capital gamma between two lines, meaning '300'. This means that we can fix the exact location of B 17 + ensemble **a** within the work: the whole passage was *On Nature* Book 1, lines 232–300. Since the ancient roll is set out in regular columns of 30 lines, that also means that B 17 + section **a** will have spanned columns 8 to 10 of the roll. In terms of content, these lines were almost certainly the principal presentation of doctrine of the cosmic cycle in the work. Since the initial (1999) edition, Richard Janko, in an important 2004 *ZPE* article, has further advocated placing all of the sections in close proximity, with section **c**, which overlaps with B 20, as the top eight lines of column 11, and then sections **d**, **f** and **b** together in column 12. Most later editors, including W., adopt this relative ordering of the material, without necessarily also taking on Janko's exact column numbering.

We can now begin to turn to the volume. After a first introductory chapter, W. builds his case over chapters 2 to 7, largely following the textual reconstruction described above, but also taking in other passages as needed to support his arguments. Chapter 8, 'Zusammenfassung', summarizes his reconstruction, while chapter 9 presents his edited Greek text with a facing page German translation. The study is followed by a brief biographical memoir devoted to W.'s ancestor, the philologist Eduard Wellmann (1842–1918). A general bibliography, which runs to 2016, is succeeded by a short bibliography to the memoir (why not put it with the memoir?), and then various indices round out the book.

What then is the substance of W.'s case? Unfortunately, in order to discuss that, I must offer yet another introduction, this time to the debate on the cosmic cycle. While all parties agree that the world we inhabit is a product of the shared influence of Love and Strife, disagreement arises as to how we should understand the current direction of the world and the phases of the cycle from one *Sphairos* to the next. The more standard but hardly unanimous modern view, supported by Aristotle, is that we live in the world of rising Strife, subsequent to its disruption of the *Sphairos*. There is indeed plentiful evidence for cosmology under Strife, for example that the heavens were produced by the separation of air and fire from an original mix. If we also assume the equality of Love and Strife, as seems required by the very idea of a cycle, this would imply a balancing counter-reign of Strife, a phase or at least instant of maximal elemental separation, when compounds can no longer exist. While there is some ancient evidence for this, it is unclear. But now, less plausibly, such a view would also seem to entail that Empedocles must have in fact posited a *double* cosmology and zoogony, one for each half of the cycle: one cosmology-zoogony under rising Strife, from the *Sphairos* to our world and its eventual dissolution; another cosmology-zoogony under rising Love, from fully separated elements to inhabited world. When we look to the evidence, however, we find that Love is often connected to zoogony, and never to cosmology. When, in fragment B 35, Empedocles describes the return of Love to the elements, the immediate result is mortal creatures, not a world. Note, finally, that according to the traditional theory of a symmetrical double cosmogony-zoogony, the fragments describing Love's creation of the limbs would have to be situated not in the past of this, our world, but in a previous counter-world of rising Love.

Given these added complications, why then posit a fully symmetrical cycle? Once can certainly see why some, including W., prefer a more economical narrative in which Strife creates our cosmos, by separation, and then Love fashions our limbs and perhaps us. The answer, in my opinion, is simply that the balance of evidence supports the traditional double cosmogony-zoogony. This, however, is not the place to argue for that, but to scrutinize W.'s arguments for the alternative. Although I believe the case to be ultimately wrong, W's treatment is original, based on a close reading of the texts, and fully informed. In what follows, I will try to give an accurate account of W's positive arguments and then to suggest those moves that to me seem most questionable.

W. makes a good start at pp. 16–19, by showing how weak the papyrological support is for Primavesi's textual reconstruction of lines 1.273–87 (the portion of section **a** that continues B 17) as a positive account of the reign of Strife. W. often has in his sights Professor Primavesi, one of the editors of the *editio princeps* of the papyrus, and the author of many other important editions and studies, who is also an adherent of the traditional, symmetrical cycle. There is nothing malicious about this, since it merely reflects Primavesi's status as the current authority.

After that brief *pars destruans*, W.'s positive case begins in chapter 2, 'Der Wechsel zwischen Mehreren und Einem' with his analysis of B 17. After declaring his intention to defend the non-symmetrical view of the cycle, he advances what I think is an overly Heraclitean reading of the passage, and through it, the cosmic cycle (see Plato *Sophist* 243a). W. insists that the alternation of one and many, which is so prominent in B 17, is both fundamental and never-ending. This is half-true in so far as W. seems right to push back against any exclusively macro or micro-cosmic reading, but wrong when he sees it as axiomatic and not reducible to any other terms. W. next recognizes the importance, for the double-zoogony, of Panzerbeiter's 1844 emendation of the received text of B 17.5/1.246, θρυφθεῖσα, to θρεφθεῖσα, and rejects it (p. 36–42). He then defends the eternity of the elements, but otherwise seems to lump all types of mixture together as undifferentiated 'ones', ignoring Empedocles' interest in the variety of mixtures and their products. More than that, he fails to see that plants and animals themselves have parts, each part having its own structure and elemental ratios. Empedoclean living beings are more than just mixtures: they are complex one-and-many structures.

Chapter 3 gives a good analysis of Love and Strife as principles and suggests that a lot of Strife's work can be attributed instead to the like-to-like principle. I was not persuaded by that, nor by W.'s reading of the simile of the painters (B 23), where W. sees only Love/Kypris at work, whereas the duals, surely, are meant to evoke Love and Strife (note B 23.4: τὰ μὲν πλέω, ἄλλα δ' ἐλάσσω). Otherwise he is right to note that the characterisation of Strife is always negative. In ch. 4 p. 82, W. correctly restores 1.273 to πά]ντῃι δ' ἄϊσσοντα [διαμ]ερεῖς οὐδ[αμὰ λήγει, at which I cheer, but then goes too far in claiming, in large part on its basis, that the elements are forever in motion, even during the *Sphairos*. Surely the scope of the sentence may have been limited by the

context. The passage is poorly preserved, so it might only mean that ‘the elements never cease soaring about in all directions’ when they are not in the *Sphairos* or the like. W. spends the next pages arguing implausibly against a considerable amount of Aristotelian evidence, but the question is too detailed to consider here. But he is correct, in my view, to reject the evidential worth of the Byzantine scholia.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with, respectively, cosmology and zoogony. In cosmology, W. proposes a moderate reign of Strife, a period of elemental churn so strong that no living creatures survive, but argues against the modern hypothesis of fully separated elemental spheres. He takes the new lines 1.285–7 to describe a period of ‘peak’ Strife prior to Love’s action at the start of the zoogonic phase, according to his revised single cosmogony-zoogony, and offers a detailed and interesting but problematic account of the origins of the sun. Chapter 6 sees W. engage with zoogony. This is one of the richest chapters, but again the material is too complex to discuss in a review, especially the complicated doxographic testimony A 72 on the different stages of the origins of life, nor can I adequately summarize, let alone criticize how W. deals with B 62, the key positive evidence for a zoogony of Strife. In other respects, however, W. rightly rejects Primavesi’s reading of the new lines 1.291–300 as the introduction to an excursus, p. 133: ‘...dass hier kein Exkurs einleitender Neueinsatz stattfindet, sondern den Übergang zu einem bisher nicht behandelten Teil der Naturphilosophie ankündigt.’ For who is to say what is or is not on topic, against the primary text? W. next engages with the biological-zoogonic material from section **d**. There is much of interest here but also much to contest, again most of it too detailed to discuss. W. follows Janko (2004) in integrating sections **f** and **d** to the same column, but otherwise his suggestions for the text are not so much wrong as proceeding from premises I reject. A more recent suggestion, too late for W. to have noted, is that the passage may describe the origins of trees, rather than animals, see C. Ferella (2019) in *Classical Quarterly* 69.1:75–86.

Chapter 7 is devoted to Empedocles’ conception of life and death according to sections **c**/B 20 and especially **d**. The latter, as noted above, contains material that presents a strong thematic identity with *Purifications* material and which, it is generally recognized, now shows the unity of Empedocles’ thought. W. concedes this much on p. 162, but for all that rejects a reference at **d** 5 to 10, to

reincarnation lore. To my mind, W. tries too hard to explain *away* the other-worldly side of Empedocles' thought, by giving an autobiographical reading of his outcry against meat-eating or sacrificial slaughter. According to W., Empedocles' lament at d 5–7 expresses his horror at recalling his first participation in sacrifice, instead of lamenting his fall from the gods as narrated in B 115. Yet at p. 183 n. 528 W. seems open to restoring d 8 to ἐξικ]γούμεε[θα γὰρ πολυβενθ[έα χῶρον], ὅϊω, which would directly connect his outcry to the theme of heavenly exile. The question is bound to remain controversial, but against W., let me point out one important consideration in favour of including reincarnation within the *On Nature*. In the poetic formula found at lines 1.269–72, repeated elsewhere in the poem, Empedocles lists the living kinds produced by the elements, and puts long-lived gods at the top of the list: 1.272: καί τε θεοὶ δολιχαίωνες τιμῇσι φέριστοι. If there are naturalized gods in an Empedoclean cosmos, as there also are in Plato's *Timaeus*, it does not seem that unthinkable to include reincarnation.

This is a careful and closely argued re-thinking of Empedocles that makes full use of the new papyrological material. If I have found much to disagree with, that is simply par for the course in Empedoclean studies, where no such thing as a consensus exists, even on the most fundamental issues. As is the function of a review, I have concentrated on points I found open to question, passing over many other points of agreement.

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