

Платон и платоноведение

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Powers of Love and Strife in Empedocles' Physics*

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ABSTRACT. In Empedocles' philosophy, the names of the forces at work — Love and Strife — inevitably evoke an emotional response and clear ethical associations in the reader. The question of whether Love should be considered good and Strife evil has been debated since the time of Aristotle, who never provided a definitive answer. Subsequent commentators on Empedocles' philosophy were less sceptical, unhesitatingly associating Love with good and Strife with evil. This article attempts to shed light on this issue by examining fragments, evidence and parallel passages in Plato. J. Mansfeld's approach is used as a methodological basis, assuming that Plato not only borrowed some concepts from Empedocles, but also actively reworked them in accordance with his own ideas. Consequently, this paper proposes examining Empedocles' philosophy through the lens of Plato's later dialogues, in which the fundamental principles and structure of the world are discussed. The main conclusion is that there are no substantial grounds for considering Love a good principle and Strife an evil one. Judging by the surviving fragments and indirect evidence, the most accurate interpretation is that they are physical forces of nature.

KEYWORDS: Empedocles, Plato, Love, Strife, Receptacle, Demiurge, Helmsman.

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The concepts of 'good' and 'evil' are not explicitly present in Empedocles' philosophy.¹ However, already in antiquity, some authors interpreted the duality of acting forces as an opposition between good and evil principles. One of the first thinkers who may have laid the groundwork for such an interpretation was Aristotle. For instance, in *Metaph.* 985a5–10, he expresses this idea as follows:

For if we were to follow out the view of Empedocles, and interpret it according to its meaning and not to its lispng expression, we should find that [5] friendship is the cause of good things, and strife of bad. Therefore, if we said that Empedocles in a sense both mentions, and is the first to mention, the bad and the good as principles, we should perhaps be right, since the cause of all goods is the [10] good itself.²

Aristotle's position regarding the causes of good and evil in Empedocles may at first appear unequivocal. However, it is important to consider several of his qualifying remarks, such as "in a certain sense" (ἐν τινι φαίη τρόπον) or "if one grasps his words according to their meaning, and not by what he says obscurely" (ψελλίζεται λέγων Ἐμπεδοκλῆς). These phrases seem to indicate some hesitation in his interpretation. Indeed, shortly afterward, Aristotle introduces another argument (985a20–30):

And Empedocles, though he uses the causes to a greater extent than this, neither does so sufficiently nor attains consistency in their use. At least, in many cases he makes friendship segregate things, and strife [25] aggregate them. For when the universe is dissolved into its elements by strife, fire is aggregated into one, and so is each of the other elements; but when again under the influence of friendship they come together into one, the parts must again be segregated out of each element.

¹ An exception might be considered fragment B 144 DK = D 33 LM, which consists of just a few words: ...νηστεῦσαι κακότητος. Since the context is unknown, it can be translated in different ways — either as "to abstain from evil" or as "to abstain from cowardice, faint-heartedness, or corruption".

² Here and below, the *Metaphysics* is quoted in W.D. Ross's translation, unless otherwise stated.

In this passage, Aristotle presents two possible ways of interpreting Empedocles' forces. The first approach appears to be based on grasping his words according to their intended meaning (πρὸς τὴν διάνοιαν), according to which Love and Strife correspond to the causes of good and evil, respectively. However, if one attends to Empedocles' more obscure pronouncements, it becomes clear that his cosmology does not present the matter so definitely. It is likely that the very names Empedocles gave to his acting forces would have evoked in many ancient readers a reaction similar to Aristotle's. Although Aristotle is quite often inclined to interpret his predecessors in a way that suits his own framework, he remains attentive to details and, striving to be intellectually honest with his audience, presents an opposing viewpoint — whereas others stop at the first, more straightforward assertion.

This highly instructive passage highlights the very problem that will be examined further and which I frame as a question: Is it possible, based on the surviving fragments of Empedocles' poem and the relevant historical-philosophical context, to confidently assert that Love is associated with what is good and benevolent, while Strife is linked to what is evil and harmful?

The idea of a benevolent god first appears in Plato. Jaap Mansfeld argues that: "Plato's cosmogony *as a whole* is (also!) a critical response to that of Empedocles, and that this, in part, explains why he calls the Demiurge good, and anyhow fully explains why he explicitly rejects the idea that a Demiurge could not be good".³ Had this view been Plato's own, it might have been motivated by the ambiguous ethical attributes of Love and Strife in Empedocles' system implying that Empedocles had no conception of a benevolent god and that, from this perspective, Love did not fulfill that role either. Such a retrospective reading could prove highly fruitful for our inquiry. Many scholars have noted the parallels between the philosophical frameworks of Empedocles and Plato, demonstrating the former's influence on the latter. However, we must not overlook the fact that Plato did not merely borrow ideas but actively reinterpreted and at times rejected elements of the

³ Mansfeld 1981: 299.

preceding tradition.⁴ By examining both the convergences and divergences in the philosophical outlooks of Empedocles and Plato, I will attempt to clarify the ambiguities in Empedocles' ethics.

The central thesis of J. Mansfeld's article lies in tracing the origins of the Gnostic concept of an Evil Demiurge within ancient philosophical tradition. Empedocles occupies a prominent place in this investigation. At first glance, identifying an evil demiurge in Empedocles might seem straightforward: one could simply assume it to be Strife, given the term's inherently negative connotations. Indeed, several fragments describe Strife in strikingly harsh terms such as "baleful Strife" (B 19 DK = D 62 LM), "agonizing Strife" (B 109 DK = D 207 LM), and in two instances, the word "Strife" is replaced by "Rage" (κότος) (B 21 DK = D 77A LM; B 121 DK = D 24 LM), which can also be translated as "wrath".⁵ At this point, one might conclude that the answer is clear. However, let us turn to Aristotle's testimony. In the *On Generation and Corruption* (333b20–334a10), he analyzes the types of motion inherent to Love and Strife. Aristotle notes that one might assume Love to be associated with gentle, natural motion — yet this is not the case — and Strife, by separating the elements, allows them to move in accordance with their inherent tendencies. Aristotle supports this claim with fragment B 53 DK = D 105 LM: "For it was in this way that it [scil. aether] happened to run sometimes, but often differently".⁶

The notion of coercive force is most commonly associated with evil, and according to Aristotle, it is Love — not Strife — that is linked to such compulsion. However, the claim that Love violently forces the elements to unite and move in a manner contrary to their nature

⁴ For example, A. Taylor, in his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* (Taylor 1928), often mentions Empedocles as the direct author of various ideas that Plato develops into more detailed narratives. J. Hershbell (Hershbell 1974) disagrees with him.

⁵ A recent article by J.-C. Picot is devoted to an analysis of this word. An important observation for the present study is that in the *Purifications* and in the *On Nature*, this word must be interpreted in different ways. In the *Purifications*, it has a more emotional connotation, while in the *On Nature* it is used to emphasise the waning power of Strife, when hatred is no longer present, but only weakened malice remains (Picot 2022: 26).

⁶ Here and elsewhere, the fragments of Empedocles are given in Laks-Most translation (Laks, Most 2016).

clearly contradicts Empedocles' own words in the sixth line of fragment B 35 DK = D 75 LM, which speaks of their voluntary coming together.

In fact, Aristotle says that not only Strife destroys the world of Love, but also Love destroys the world created by itself, because those parts of living beings that were formed by Love in the transitional period then become absolutely indistinguishable in Sphairos. We meet here with the concept known from many mythologies and later philosophical systems, that without destruction there can be no creation. Needless to say, one is better or worse than the other. Strife in this case is not an evil Demiurge, but only a natural development of the Universe, its necessary and inevitable stage.

Let us examine what the fragments of the poem reveal about the workings of Love. First, many descriptions of Love are imbued with benevolence and perfection: "the gentle-thinking immortal drive of blameless Love" (B 35.13 DK = D 75.13 LM), "anchored in the perfect harbors of Cypris" (B 98 DK = D 190 LM), "fitted together marvelously by Harmony's adhesives" (B 96 DK = D 192 LM). The various names of Love also stand out — Aphrodite, Cypris, Harmony, Friendship, Joy. Second, Aphrodite acts according to a plan, employing proportion to craft the parts of living beings (B 96 DK = D 192 LM):

And kindly earth in her broad-breasted crucibles
Received two parts, out of eight, of the gleaming Nestis
And four of Hephestus...

Out of harmoniously (= proportionately) mixed primordia appear all the forms and colours of mortal beings (B 71 DK = D 61 LM):

If your belief about these things were ever lacking in firmness —
How from water, earth, aether, and sun
Mixed together, the forms and colors of mortal things come about,
As they all exist now, fitted together by Aphrodite...

Third, Empedocles presents Love as something immensely significant, yet not always nor to everyone accessible to intellectual contemplation. When events unfold harmoniously, people call it joy and friendship, unaware of the fundamental principle underlying it all (B 17.22–24 DK = D 73.253–255 LM):

She who mortals too think is implanted in their joints,
And by whom they have loving thoughts and perform deeds of union,
Calling her 'Joy' as byname and 'Aphrodite'.

It would be strange to think that people do not know what love is. Obviously it is something sensual, sensually perceived and familiar to all without exception. But what then do mortals overlook, what remains beyond their comprehension, as stated in B 17.25–26 DK = D 73.256–257 LM:

That it is she who is going around among them,
No mortal man knows this.

The answer may lie in the fact that Love is not merely a deity that unites opposites, facilitates collaborative labor, and fosters both friendly and erotic relationships, but something far more fundamental. A. Laks and G.W. Most suggest that “among them” refers to “among the elements”.⁷ If this is the case, the statement becomes even more remarkable. This Love, which fills the space between the primordial elements, is unknown to anyone, and it is not quite the same love that people commonly speak of. The Love that Empedocles teaches is present in every mixture and among all the primordial elements within that mixture. She is a universal law of nature, the knowledge of which is revealed only through intellectual contemplation, not through sensory perception.⁸

From the available set of testimonies and fragments, one may conclude that the actions of Love are more purposeful and rational in nature. Reconstructing the description of Strife, however, proves far more challenging, as the surviving fragments say very little about it. Consequently, scholars must rely more heavily on secondary testimonies. The fragments indicate that under the rule of Strife, the primordial elements move apart, resist mixture, separate, and ultimately form four distinct masses of substance: fire, earth, water, and air. For instance,

⁷ Laks, Most 2016: 415.

⁸ Compare with the fragment of Philolaus B 6 DK: “Concerning nature and harmony the situation is this: the being of things, which is eternal, and nature in itself admit of divine and not human knowledge” (trans. C. Huffman).

B 21 DK = D 77A LM states: “Under Hatred, all things are divided in form and are separated”, while a similar idea appears in B 20.19–20 DK = D 73.305–306 LM:

Sometimes in turn, cut apart by evil quarrels,
Each one wanders separately in the surf of life.

Overall, understanding the workings of Strife depends on how we define the phases of the cosmic cycle.⁹ In the Strasbourg Papyrus (a(ii) 3–17 = D 73.273–287 LM), which survives in a highly fragmentary state, there emerges a narrative marked by striking dynamism and rapidity:

Under her [scil. Strife] rule, they incessantly shoot forth continually
In dense eddies...
Without interruption, and never...
Many earlier lifetimes...
Before from these they go over...
〈*And everywhere they incessantly*〉 shoot forth continually.
For neither the sun... 〈*...nor the moon*〉
Filled with this drive...
And none of the other things...
But exchanging their places, they shoot forth everywhere in a circle.
For at that time the earth runs untrodden, and the sun’s
...as big as men can 〈*infer*〉;
In the same way all these things [scil. the elements] 〈*always run*〉
through one another,
And each one, as it wanders, occupies a different place...
We have 〈*not yet*〉 arrived in the center 〈*to be only*〉 one.

These lines contain many words with negative prefixes, mentioning a vortex, uninterrupted motion, drive, and wandering. It is difficult to discern which force’s rule is being referred to here. A. Laks and G.W. Most argue¹⁰ that a paraphrase of this passage can be found in

⁹ A. Laks and G.W. Most, in their collection of fragments, highlight a section entitled *The Operation of the Two Fundamental Powers: Unification and Affinities*. At the beginning of the section they note that it contains fragments belonging to different phases of the cosmic cycle, but that it is difficult or even impossible to determine their exact location in the poem (Laks, Most 2016: 407).

¹⁰ Laks, Most 2016: 417, n. 5.

Plutarch's *On the Face Which Appears in the Orb of the Moon* (*De facie* 12 = *M.* 926d–927a), where he discusses the intervention of providence in the disorderly cosmic process. According to him, mutual repulsion and avoidance are characteristic of the rule of Strife. Thus, modern scholars, relying on this evidence, attribute lines 273–287 from the Strasbourg Papyrus to the same principle. Plutarch offers a detailed account of the alternating rule of opposing forces, framing it within a Platonic context. It could be argued that his description remains quite faithful to Empedocles' original text with one notable exception – his claim that the primordial fundamental principles are violently compelled to abandon their natural state. This diverges from the extant fragments, which explicitly state that the roots mix voluntarily and through the impulse of Love (B 22 DK = D 101 LM and B 35 DK = D 75 LM):

In the same way, all the things that are, rather, receptive of mixture
Love one another, made similar by Aphrodite.

Under her [Love's] dominion all these [i.e. the elements] come together
to be only one,

Each one coming from a different place, not brusquely, but willingly...

Yet the reference to Plato is particularly noteworthy. Let us examine a passage from *Timaeus* 53ab, where Plato describes the condition of the Receptacle before the Demiurge begins the creation of the universe:

Likewise, when these four were shaken at that time by the receptacle (which was itself in motion, like an implement for shaking stuff), the least similar among them ended up the furthest apart, and those that were most similar were pushed the closest together. This explains, of course, how they came to occupy different locations even before they had become the constituents of the orderly universe that came into existence. Not only were they disproportionate and erratic, however, before that event, but even when the organization of the universe was first taken in hand, fire, water, earth, and air, despite displaying certain hints of their true natures, were still wholly in the kind of state you'd expect anything to be with no god present. Finding them in that con-

dition, then, the first thing the god did, when he came to organize the universe, was use shapes and numbers to assign them definite forms.¹¹

Jaap Mansfeld also draws attention to this passage, emphasizing the distinctive role of the Demiurge. He interprets the Demiurge as an organizing force that brings stability to the state of things and argues that its action cannot be considered destructive but solely constructive, since it results in the good — a principle inherently linked to order and harmony.¹² Here, we encounter an epistemic conception of the good: as long as the traces of the elements remain unmanifest within the Receptacle, they cannot be known. This is precisely why an ordering intervention is necessary — to alter their state, rendering them perceptible and describable. If we adopt this understanding of the good and situate Empedocles within a Platonic framework, neither Love nor Strife can be regarded as benevolent principles. At both extremes under the exclusive rule of Love or Strife nothing knowable exists. In the *Sphairos* all is fused into undifferentiated unity, leaving no distinctions to be discerned. Conversely, when the elemental roots are fully separated, there are no composite entities, and the roots themselves, in their disunited state, resemble a kind of prime matter, which likewise remains unknowable.

Plato does not explicitly mention any principle opposed to the good in the *Timaeus*.¹³ However, the interactions between the traces of the elements and the Receptacle are described as a kind of blind and irrational process (*Ti.* 52de):

As if it were not enough that the nurse of creation presents a complex appearance (as a result of being moistened and heated, of assuming the characters of earth and air, and of acquiring all the qualities that follow from all this), it is also thoroughly imbalanced (as a result of

¹¹ Here and elsewhere, the *Timaeus* is in R. Waterfield's translation, unless otherwise stated.

¹² Mansfeld 1981: 297.

¹³ Perhaps Empedocles did the same when describing the actions of Strife? In that case the reason for the small number of fragments devoted to Strife should be considered not their poor preservation, but the philosopher's unwillingness to talk much about the opposite principle.

being filled with dissimilar and imbalanced powers), and not only is it shaken by the things it contains, so that it lurches haphazardly all over the place, but its motion in turn further shakes them.

Is this not a parallel to Empedocles' Strife, which, according to the surviving fragments and evidence, can be interpreted as the force responsible for concentrating the separated parts of matter into four masses of substance? If this comparison with the *Timaeus* holds, then Aristotle's previously cited opinion that Strife represents random, disordered motion gains further weight. In other words, Strife is a force that does not act according to a plan but merely returns the elemental roots to their primordial and natural state, since "natural" here refers to that which lacks deliberate design. Plato quite unequivocally interprets natural motion as a form of decline, whereas Empedocles does not present it so explicitly. Following this Platonic comparison, it would be more accurate to say that in Empedocles we encounter a contrast between the natural and the artificial, rather than between evil and good. To further explore this theme, let us turn to a passage from the *Statesman* 270a:

The universe is guided at one time by an extrinsic divine cause, acquiring the power of living again and receiving renewed immortality from the Creator, and at another time it is left to itself and then moves by its own motion, being left to itself at such a moment that it moves backwards through countless ages.¹⁴

Plato states that when the cosmos is left without the guidance of divine reason, it begins to move in the opposite direction. One might imagine this as a clockwork spring that is wound to a certain state of tension and then released, causing it to naturally unwind in reverse. The act of winding the spring requires deliberate intention, effort, and reason — only then does it acquire autonomous motion. Let us now examine another passage from this dialogue (*Plt.* 272e):

The helmsman dropped the tiller of the rudder and withdrew to his

¹⁴ Here and elsewhere, the *Statesman* (*Politicus*) is in H. Fowler's translation, unless otherwise stated.

place of outlook, and fate and innate desire made the cosmos turn backwards.¹⁵

The idea that the artificial is superior to the natural is also reflected in the tale of the generation of humans during the age of Cronus, who were born from the earth as wise elders and then lived their lives in joy and harmony, for their wisdom allowed them to avoid mistakes (*Plt.* 271d–272d). By contrast, natural human birth from other humans is presented as the inferior option, since people are born unskilled and untrained, ignorant of how to procure food for themselves and requiring lengthy upbringing (274c). This leads to unpleasant and often tragic consequences, such as when a defenseless human is attacked by a wild beast (274b).

When the myth in the *Statesman* describes humans emerging from the earth as elders and living their lives in reverse, one is reminded of lines from Empedocles' fragment B 62 DK = D 157 LM. There, in his characteristically enigmatic manner, the poet alludes allegorically and rather obscurely to the emergence from the earth of certain androgynous beings whose sexual organs were undifferentiated.¹⁶

Come then: how fire, separating off, drew upward the nocturnal
saplings
Of much-weeping men and women —
Hear this. For my tale is not aimless nor ignorant.
First, complete outlines sprang up from the earth
Possessing a share of both, of water as of heat.
These fire sent upward, wishing to reach what was similar to it;
As yet they displayed neither the lovely framework of limbs
Nor the voice and the organ that is native to men.¹⁷

Empedocles, by contrast, describes the earth-born humans as weeping, as if foreseeing their future suffering.

¹⁵ Fowler's translation is slightly modified here.

¹⁶ It is possible that Empedocles himself borrowed the idea of origin from the earth, for example, from Anaximander, see A 10 DK, A 30 DK.

¹⁷ Based on this fragment, M. Rashed fills in the gaps in the Strasbourg Papyrus collection (Rashed 2011).

Particularly noteworthy is that section of the *Statesman's* myth, which describes the state of the cosmos when abandoned by the Helmsman (273a–273e). I draw special attention to it because here we encounter the image of an ancient discord (παλαιά ἀναρμοστία) that negatively affects the cosmos. When the Helmsman sees that the cosmos has become too disordered and that the influence of this primordial dissonance has grown too strong, he takes up the rudder once more, preventing the cosmos from collapsing entirely. This very image of dissonance cannot but recall the state of Empedocles' cosmos under the rule of Strife. The transitional periods represent dynamic situations where one force wanes while the other waxes. The shift from Love to Strife manifests as a gradual decline of order and the habit of union, accompanied by an increase in random events whose accumulation ultimately leads to the complete separation of the elemental roots into homogeneous masses of matter.

In Plato's phrasing — τὸ τῆς παλαιᾶς ἀναρμοστίας πάθος (*Plt.* 273c7–273d1) — the word ἀναρμοστία ('dissonance') stands out, as it can be seen as an expression of Empedoclean Strife, the antithesis of Harmony-Aphrodite. Yet unlike Empedocles, Plato does not allow the cosmos to disintegrate back into its primordial state of matter. This distinction likely reflects Plato's intention to present a new, optimistic vision of cosmic existence — one that rejects Empedocles' inevitable naturalism and the equality of opposing forces. In essence, we see that chance and natural motion are declared by Plato to be evils that must be halted. His world is monistic. Unlike Empedocles, he cannot admit into it a force as influential as the Demiurge or the Helmsman yet equally destructive. Empedocles, for his part, did not seek to present cosmic order as indestructible, and thus had no logical need to privilege one force over the other.

Thus, in Plato's framework, there exists a benevolent god and an opposing evil nature. Though not explicitly termed "evil", this principle is contrasted with the optimal state of affairs, which justifies interpreting it as negative or malign (*Plt.* 273c–273d):

Now as long as the world was nurturing the animals within itself under

the guidance of the Helmsman, it produced little evil and great good; but in becoming separated from him it always got on most excellently during the time immediately after it was let go, but as time went on and it grew forgetful, the ancient condition of disorder (τὸ τῆς παλαιᾶς ἀναρμοστίας πάθος) prevailed more and more. And towards the end of the time reached its height, and the universe, mingling but little good with much of the opposite sort (σμικρὰ μὲν τὰγαθὰ, πολλὴν δὲ τὴν τῶν ἐναντίων), was in danger of destruction for itself and those within it.¹⁸

The final sentence references the good (τὰγαθὰ) and its opposite (τὰ ἐναντία), that is, the bad. This “bad” should likely be identified with the aforementioned “ancient dissonance” or discord. Indeed, the term “dissonance” (ἀναρμοστία) is the negation of harmony (ἁρμονία) and, by extension, of order and beauty. Moreover, this dissonance is itself a state or affliction (πάθος). Thus, anything existing in a state of disharmony and disproportion, which leads to the separation of what was once united, may be considered evil. Much of this aligns with Empedocles, but only until we recall Aristotle’s valid observation that it is not only Strife that separates but also Love, which, like Strife, sets in motion what had previously been at rest and in a kind of unity. If we define evil solely in terms of division and the disruption of prior unity, then Love too would fall under this definition — a point that only reinforces our argument that these forces cannot be reduced to ethical categories.

Plato speaks more openly about evil in the *Laws* 897cd:

If, my good sir, we are to assert that the whole course and motion of Heaven and of all it contains have a motion like to the motion and revolution and reckonings of reason, and proceed in a kindred manner, then clearly we must assert that the best soul (τὴν ἀρίστην ψυχὴν) regulates the whole cosmos and drives it on its course, which is of the kind described. But the bad soul, if it proceeds in a mad and disorderly way (Εἰ δὲ μανικῶς τε καὶ ἀτάκτως ἔρχεται, τὴν κακὴν).¹⁹

¹⁸ Fowler’s translation is slightly modified.

¹⁹ Translated by R.G. Bury

Next comes an example with a carved spinning top (σφαίρας ἐντόρνου, 898b), which is supposed to illustrate correct movement — “moving regularly and uniformly in the same spot, round the same things and in relation to the same things, according to one rule and system”, while movement that differs from it, i.e., “the motion that is never uniform or regular or in the same place or around or in relation to the same things, not moving in one spot nor in any order or system or rule” is declared evil (898c). It would be quite natural to compare the second type of movement with the movement of the Receptacle when it is compared to a sieve. This movement can be described as a “back and forth” movement, without any predetermined trajectory and constantly changing it. And if in the *Timaeus* we only caught echoes of Plato’s negative attitude towards this type of movement, then in the *Laws* there is no doubt about it. I propose to apply here the methodological approach suggested by J. Mansfeld, which was outlined at the beginning of the section: Plato reworks the ideas of his predecessors and fills them with new content, therefore, what Plato has in his ethical description of the universe, Empedocles does not have. Consequently, if we can convincingly show that Plato does indeed postulate an evil fundamental principle, then we must conclude that Empedocles does not yet have this idea.

In the works of Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Anaxagoras, the divine principle is associated with rationality (nous), but none characterize it as inherently “good”. Despite the many soft and pleasing epithets Empedocles bestows upon Aphrodite, and despite introducing an opposing principle (Strife), I argue that he remains within the tradition of a rational, yet ethically neutral, divinity.

The same applies to Strife. Much evidence suggests that in Plato’s world, an evil principle exists — one expressed through disorder, chance, blindness, irrationality, and elusiveness. By contrast, Empedocles’ Strife is not an evil force but a natural and inevitable one, equally vital for the cosmos’s life as the artificially unifying force of Love. And since it is natural and unavoidable, there is no reason to call it evil.

Empedocles' own words addressed to his listeners serve as indirect confirmation of this (B 15 DK = D 52 LM):

A wise man would not surmise such things in his mind:
That so long as they live what they call a life,
For so long they are, and evil things and good ones (δειλὰ καὶ ἐσθλὰ)
are theirs,
But that before mortals have coalesced and <after> having dissolved,
they are nothing.

According to this fragment, good and evil do not exist as absolute categories. They are merely human judgments made during mortal life. Empedocles' physics presents an endless cycle of transformations. It is these changes that mortals perceive as good or evil. But change is inevitable, dictated by nature itself and an unspoken law that cannot be violated. Therefore, on the physical level, good and evil do not exist.

Why then does Empedocles call Strife "Malice" or "evil hatred"? Perhaps this too reflects a mortal perspective. Though not considering himself an ordinary mortal, Empedocles occasionally falls into the trap of mortal misconceptions, applying value judgments to what is inherently devoid of them. The fragment B 9 DK = D 54 LM confirms this:

But when they [all things] are separated apart, this in turn they call
'unfortunate destiny' (δυσδαίμονα πότμον),
As is licit <θέμις>, and I myself too apply it [i.e. this term] in the same
way.

In conclusion, I argue that Love and Strife should be understood in physical rather than ethical terms as powers akin to attraction and repulsion. Otherwise, we would be forced to ask ourselves: is our expanding universe perhaps the result of some malevolent will that drives particles apart?

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