

Love and the Nature of Being,
Reflected in the Fragments of Empedocles
By Anthony Bernini

"...the direct, total awareness, from the inside, so to say, of Love as the primary and fundamental cosmic fact."

- *The Doors of Perception*, Aldous Huxley (1954)

People continue to be drawn to the proposition expressed by the social architect, August Jaccaci, that love is the source, substance, and future of all being. This idea is axiomatic in an emergent expression of a cosmology that attempts to account for and assess other events and concepts, such as the varieties of quantum nonlocality, panpsychism, and the quantum hologram. This note will simply introduce one historical antecedent, the extant fragmentary poetry of the Sicilian thinker Empedocles, that confirms the enduring quality of humankind's effort to understand Love, and itself, within a comprehensible unity in nature.

Does love have the substance of a basic element of nature? Here is what 5th century B.C. thinker Empedocles wrote about love:

Here first the four roots of all things:
shining Zeus, life-giving Hera, Aidoneus, and Nestis
who with her tears fills the springs
from which mortals draw the waters of life. (Fragment 6)

And I shall tell you something more.
There is no birth in mortal things,
and no end in ruinous death.
There is only mingling and interchange of parts,
and it is this that we call nature. (Fr. 8)

These two forces, Love and Strife, existed
in the past and will exist in the future;
nor will boundless time, I believe, ever be empty of the pair (Fr. 16)

... I shall tell a twofold tale. At a certain time one alone grew
out of many, and at another time it grew apart to be many out of one:
fire and water and earth and the immense height of air,
and cursed Strife apart from these and equal in every respect,
and Love among them, equal in length and breadth.
Her must thou see with the mind, nor sit with eyes bemused:
She it is who is acknowledged to be implanted in the limbs of mortals,
whereby they think kindly thoughts and do peaceful works,
calling her Joy by name and Aphrodite.

No mortal man is aware of her as she circles round among these,
But do thou listen to the unfolding of a discourse that is not deceitful.
All these are equal and coeval,
but each is in a different province and each has its own character,
and they prevail in turn as time circles round.
And besides these nothing comes into being nor ceases to be;
if they were continually perishing, they would no longer be;
and what could increase this All? Whence would it come?
And how also could it perish, for nothing is empty of these things?
No. These are just these, but running through one another
They become now some things and now others and yet ever and
always the same. (Fr. 17)

One is reminded, reading this fragment, that Edgar Mitchell, former astronaut and founder of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, is said to have described the Universe as fundamentally diadic, in response to a question about love; that is, if there is Love, there is always its opposite, Strife. Commenting in part upon the fragment quoted above, the scholar Charles H. Kahn in 1960 offered that "Love and Strife are described not only as dynamic principles of cohesion and dissolution, but also as physical masses on a par with Fire, Water, Earth, and Air."

W. C. K. Guthrie's monumental *A History of Greek Philosophy* informs us that Empedocles was born in Acragas, Sicily (now Agrigento) sometime around 492 B. C. and that, by Aristotle's authority, he lived for 60 years. Guthrie places Empedocles as a pluralist in Presocratic thought about the nature of being. Empedocles posited a plurality of beings that always existed, being Air, Earth, Fire, and Water, along with Love and Strife. It is, perhaps, not just a poetic device that Empedocles used in referring to the elements as divinities. Here is an echo of the Greece of Empedocles' time, which was not only classically Apollonian, but also romantically Dionysian, filled with bacchic orgia with their "*enthusiasmos*" – "god in us".

Empedocles' contemporaries were Pericles, Socrates, Sophocles. He was probably a very young boy when Theron, the Sicilian tyrant, defeated the Carthaginians at Himera on the same day, according to Herodotus, that the Greeks defeated the Persians at the decisive battle of Salamis in 490 B. C. He is credited by some scholars as having founded the Sicilian school of medicine. Less debatably, he is a champion of democracy who disbanded the plutocracy known as The Thousand, after Theron's death. It is said that he refused a kingship.

We know that Empedocles was a poet because his extant writings consist entirely of the fragments of two poems, "On Nature", and "Purifications", totaling in all not more than 450 lines. These poetic fragments have interest, in the context of an emerging Love Cosmology, in part because they have been characterized by scholars as, respectively, works of "science" and "religion". Guthrie tells us that, although the evidence is dubious, the complete poems may have extended to six times their extant length, and, citing H. S. Long's 1949 article in the *American Journal of Philology*, that no more than 24 of the 153 fragments can be assigned to one or the other of the poems with anything like certainty. So,

the scholars have simply aggregated the fragments according to their view of whether the lines evidence “scientific thought” (On Nature) or “spiritual speculation” (Purifications). But Guthrie points out that there is little support in the literature of the time for a dichotomy between people’s religious and cosmological views.

In the emerging Love Cosmology, nature can be comprehended as the architecture of Love (consider Frs. 85-87: “The gentle flame met with a very little earth/out of which divine Aphrodite formed eyes/ Aphrodite having wrought them with rivets of love”). In nature’s elegant solutions, science and religion can be viewed as facets of the same roughhewn stone.

Some interesting parallels can be found in the fragments to some of the more provocative anecdotal events, recognition of which has been barred by “scientific method” at the door of the prevalent scientific establishment. Ken Hamilton, M. D., the allopathic former surgeon and the author of *SoulCircling: The Journey to the Who*, has done illuminating work on the ability to love oneself as a key to health and healing. He is one of a number of observers who have generated a renewed interest in panpsychism, the theory that all things in nature, or all nature itself, has a psychical aspect, at least a rudimentary life of sensation, feeling, and impulse, that bears the same relation to their movements that the psychic life of human beings bears to their observable activities. Empedocles’ descriptions of the basic elements includes the view that like substances act upon one another, and that all cognition is of like recognizing like,

For as of these commingled all things are,
even so through these men think, rejoice, or grieve (Fr. 107)
With earth we see earth, with water water,
with air the divine air, but with fire destructive fire,
with Love Love and with Strife we see dismal Strife;
for out of these are all things formed and fitted together,
and with these they think and feel pleasure and pain (Frs. 107 & 109).
The more or less continuous reconstitution of being into manifested reality has for Empedocles an element of consciousness:

If thou shouldst plant these things in thy firm understanding
and contemplate them with good will and unclouded attention,
they will stand by thee for ever every one,
and thou shalt gain many other things from them;
for these same things grow up by their own power in the heart,
according to the nature of each man.
But if thou shouldst hanker after things of a different sort,
such as in human life come in their thousands,
sorry matters that blunt men’s thoughts,
quickly will these things desert thee as time goes on,
desiring to come to their own kind,
for know that all things have wisdom and a portion of thought. (Fr. 110)

In this sense, "It is by chance that men have come to have conscious thought (Fr. 103). Fragment 106, comprised of two lines, puts it this way: "As much as men change their nature/so much it also befalls them to think different thoughts."

The phenomenon of information traveling faster than the speed of light has been referred to as a variety of quantum nonlocality, some instances of which have reportedly been effected by Edgar Mitchell. The quantum hologram is an expression used by astrophysicist Rudy Schild to refer to a grouping of photons that identifies the objects from which radiation is emitted. By definition, to perceive a small fragment of the hologram is to perceive all of it. And as Rudy Schild has put it, the more of the hologram you perceive, the more intense is your experience of it. He informs us that the scalar field, also referred to by some people as the orgone field or the zero-point energy field, the unifying "something" in the cosmos, is amplified on the surface of black holes. Black holes in the cosmos are the collapsed matter that tests the limits of density in physics, in which light and speed somehow combine. Rudy Schild has identified a field of quantum chaos around the black holes. He thinks that all of the quantum holograms emitted by all the objects in the galaxy may be heading towards those fields of quantum chaos, and are somehow stored there.

How can the perception of quantum holograms by people occur? Rudy Schild has mused that perhaps these holograms are picked up by the spinal column and analyzed by the brain. The proposition that understanding somehow involves a perception of something that moves through space is very old. The remarkable poet and translator Anne Carson, in *Eros, The Bittersweet*, discusses breath as a vehicle of transmission and reception in the oral society of the ancient world. She reminds us that words are "winged" in Homer when they issue from the speaker. She notes further:

Space and the distance between things are not of first importance; these are aspects emphasized by the visual sense.

What is vital, in a world of sound, is to maintain continuity (p. 49).

She then refers to Empedocles' doctrine of emanations, as maintaining that everything in the Universe is perpetually inhaling and exhaling aporrhoi in a constant stream. "Know that effluences flow from all things that have come to be", said Empedocles (Fr. 89). An example of the manifestation into popular culture of the concept of effluences is found in *Tarzan And The Ant Men*, by Edgar Rice Burroughs (1924), who has a prince of his ant men explaining to Tarzan an instrument that he hopes will restore Tarzan to his normal size (p.228):

From all matter and even from such incorporeal a thing as thought there emanate identical particles, so infinitesimal as to be scarce noted by the most delicate of my instruments.

Such manifestations suggest that, down through time, our kind may be apprehending more than it knows.

Love - "...Joy by name and Aphrodite" - is not the only divinity for Empedocles. So also is any one of us, for, Love is ... "implanted in the limbs of mortals" who in the cycle of rebirth have "come into this low-roofed cavern" (Fr. 120), each a "daemon...who must wander

thrice ten thousand seasons..."(Fr. 115).

At the end they become prophets, bards, physicians
and princes among men on earth.

Thence they arise as gods highest in honor,
sharing hearth and table with the other immortals,
free from human sorrows, unwearied. (Frs. 146, 147)

Rudy Schild surmises that black holes may in some way be interconnected at their source, that all galaxies have a black hole, or microquasar, at their center, and that some kind of "wormhole" connects them; that the idea of god, of "guiding principle", can manifest in this connection. Empedocles also speaks more directly, as it were, on the idea of god. These reflections on quantum nonlocality brought me back to Empedocles' image of the divinity:

The sacred mind, whole and ineffable,
flashing through the whole universe with swift thoughts (from Fr.134)