Introduction

In the fifth century BCE,[1] the early Greek thinker Empedocles of Acragas, present-day Agrigento in the southern region of Sicily, authored two poems in hexametrical verses: *Katharmoi*, 'Purifications', in two books, and *Peri Physeos* or *Physika*, 'On Nature', in three books.[2] In these, he put forward a philosophical project aiming at a comprehensive explanation of the cosmos[3] and its living beings. His extant verses deal with the dynamic of the four elements – fire, ether (or air),[4] water and earth – which are described as 'the roots of all things',[5] since they form all that exists by mixtures and separations. Their working shapes a cosmic cycle in which the elements, under the influence of the two opposite powers of Love and Strife, are eternally and regularly brought together into one thing alone (the divine and blissful form of the Sphairos) at the hands of unifying Love (Greek, Φιλότης), and are separated again into many things

[1] According to the most recent study about the chronology of early Greek philosophers by Thibodeau (2019: 177–87), Empedocles was born in 496 BCE and died in 436 BCE.

Throughout this book, the fragments of Empedocles and other early Greek philosophers will be quoted following the edition by Diels-Kranz (1951), with reference to the more recent edition by Laks-Most (2016) added in parentheses. For the verses of the Strasbourg papyrus the edition used is Laks-Most (2016). Translations from Greek and Latin sources are my own, but I regularly consulted existing translations. In particular, translations of Empedocles' fragments follow Wright (1995), Inwood (2001) and Laks-Most (2016). For other early thinkers I also used the translations by McKirahan (2010) and Graham (2010).

[2] The most important sources for Empedocles' two works are Diog. Laert. 8.54, 61–2 and 77 (= Lobon Frag. 12 Garulli). In 8.54 and 8.61–62 Diogenes associates the titles *On Nature* and *Purifications* with different Empedoclean verses; specifically, he attributes B 1 (= EMP D 41 Laks-Most) to the poem on natural philosophy and B 112 (= EMP D 4 Laks-Most) to the *Katharmoi*. In 8.77 Diogenes reports that, according to the list of Empedocles' works compiled by Lobon of Argos, *On Nature* and *Purifications* amount to five thousand lines in all. As for how many books each of the two poems comprises, see Primavesi (2006b). Against a reconstruction of Empedocles as the author of two poems, see below.

[3] While with the word 'Cosmos' I shall refer to the cosmic phase opposed to the Sphairos (see Chapter 7.1.4), I will use 'cosmos' (without capitalization) throughout as synonymous of 'world'.

[4] As the lists of the names of the roots by Wright (1995: 23) show, air and ether refer to the same element of air. As O'Brien (1969: 292) argues, Aristotle treats Empedocles' air and ether as equivalent when he describes the subject of B 53 (= EMP D 105 Laks-Most) in one place as ether (*De gen. et. corr.* 334a 1–5) and in another place as air (*Phys.* 196a 20–3).

[5] They are defined as τῶν πάντων ῥιζώματα in B 6.1 (= EMP D 57.1 Laks-Most).

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by the dividing force of Strife (Greek, Νεῖκος).[6] However, Empedocles is also the poet who teaches a more religious doctrine of rebirth and purifications, urges abstinence from sexual intercourse as well as from some kinds of food and depicts himself as a god, being reborn in human form and exiled to our world.

Although we can rely on a relatively large number of fragments,[7] the details of Empedocles' thought, especially concerning the relationship among his different and apparently contradictory philosophical interests, remain controversial. As C. Kahn put it: 'Empedocles the philosopher of nature and Empedocles the prophet of transmigration are each intelligible when taken separately. Together they seem to compose a split personality whose two sections are not united by any essential link'.[8] Thus, the fundamental question behind the study of Empedocles is still that posed by E. Zeller at the end of the nineteenth century:[9] if Empedocles' religious teachings 'stand in no visible connection with the scientific principles' of his physics, and the doctrine of rebirth and purification appears to be 'imperfectly appended to his philosophical scheme',[10] how, then, can we explain what seems to be a doctrinal antinomy in one and the same author?

This book takes on the challenge of making sense of this controversial material by reconstructing a textual base upon which Empedocles' thought can be re-evaluated in terms of a philosophical system aspiring to doctrinal unity. The argument running throughout the book is that in Empedocles' physical system, religious and philosophical interests[11] interrelate with and illuminate each other. Indeed, the doctrine of rebirth is a positive and central doctrine of Empedocles' physics. Methodologically, this study is based on the assumption that Empedocles' thought made sense with respect to his time and, also in virtue of its eschatological value, it influenced Greek philosophy and thought. Adopting this perspective, this book

[6] Whereas Φιλότης and Νεῖκος are the most common Greek names to call the powers of Love and Strife in Empedocles, it is worth noting that, as we will see in the course of this book, they are also referred to by other names.

[7] In the Diels-Kranz edition of Presocratic thinkers, 154 B-fragments (i.e., Empedocles' own words in contrast to the A-fragments, which are *Berichte* [reports], from secondary sources) are attributed to him. To them, the exceptional findings of the Strasbourg papyrus added over seventy new verses.

[8] Kahn (1960: 3). [9] See also Primavesi (2013: 667).

[10] Zeller (1920: 1001, 1004–16). See also Primavesi (2013: 667).

[11] By 'religious interests' (or even 'religion' more generally) I refer to Empedocles' concern with matters of an otherworldly nature and what Socrates would have called 'the care of one's soul' and for behaviour consistent with that. By 'philosophical interests', I mean interests in the principles of the physical world and, more generally, in the nature and order of things; that is, the kind of research topics that Aristotle attributed to the *physiologoi* and that we usually consider to be proper to early Greek philosophy.

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will show the ways in which Empedocles' physics accommodates, on a textual and contextual basis, the details of his doctrine of rebirth, thus demonstrating the centrality of this doctrine to his physical system. Indeed, it will even go beyond showing accommodation, pointing out that some pivotal aspects of Empedocles' physics seem to be premised and even structured on his concept of rebirth.

In presenting this argument, I also aim to shed new light on long-standing questions regarding the relationship between the different and apparently conflicting areas of Empedocles' thought. I will thus show that in *On Nature* Empedocles implemented a philosophical project with the main aim of indicating the way through which human beings can escape rebirth, transcend their mortal nature and become gods. To this end, I will correct previous research by reconstructing various topics and verses that scholars have usually attributed to the *Purifications* within *On Nature*, challenging thereby the standard apportionment of extant fragments between the two poems. In doing so, it will be shown that concerns about the place and fate of human beings in this world, claims for individual existence beyond the body, moral agency and personal survival through many deaths and different lives, as well as pursuit of true knowledge and solicitations for a pure way of life are not merely added to Empedocles' interests in natural philosophy, but are instead integral to his physical system.

Beyond offering a new reading of Empedocles' thought, this book also bears relevance to early Greek philosophy in general. As J. Warren claims, 'Empedocles is . . . an excellent case in which we have to think carefully about what we assume to be the nature of early Greek philosophy.'[12] My main standpoint in this book is that Empedocles is primarily concerned with human beings' pragmatic approach to their life in this world and thus focuses his enquiry into the nature of things around questions such as: what is our place in the world? What should we do with our lives and how should we face the prospect of death? Accordingly, this book may then offer an interpretative key to approach and possibly re-evaluate other pre-Socratics – including but not limited to Heraclitus, Parmenides and the Derveni author – who display similar interests to Empedocles. It may also help us to rethink early Greek philosophy primarily as a *philosophy of humans* rather than of nature.[13]

[12] Warren (2007: 137).

[13] Since antiquity, early Greek philosophy has been described as a philosophy of nature (or Presocratic naturalism) in contrast to a philosophy of humans, initiated by Socrates (or Socratic humanism). On this, see Laks (2018: 1–18).

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The choice to devote an entire monograph to Empedocles is dictated not only by the fact that, as I have just noted, he can be considered an exemplary case for a reassessment of early Greek philosophy; it is also motivated by the as-yet unresolved questions raised by his philosophy, which have drawn the interest of scholars for centuries. An indication of the relevance he has in the history of Greek philosophy is given, first, by the largest number, among pre-Socratic thinkers besides Democritus, of ancient quotations and thus of surviving fragments that have come down to us. Additionally, the extant fragments of his work do not merely come from excerpts of citations of later authors; rather, a considerable portion of his verses are transmitted directly in a papyrus dated between the first and second century CE,[14] which is evidence of the circulation of his poem – hence, of the interest it still aroused – even centuries after his death.[15]

Second, Empedocles' philosophy must have already gained great popularity shortly after his death given the earliest mention of his name is by his near-contemporary, the Hippocratic author of *Ancient Medicine* (fifth century BCE).[16] Some generations later, moreover, Plato (428–347 BCE) regularly refers to Empedocles by name; composes, in his *Symposium*, a parody of Empedocles' generation of human beings (put in the mouth of the comic poet Aristophanes)[17] and, in his *Timaeus*, constructs his cosmological and biological theories through several reminiscences of Empedoclean theories.[18] This is without even mentioning the Platonic

[14] Martin-Primavesi (1999: 14–15).

[15] As I am about to complete the final manuscript of this book, news reaches me of a papyrus finding from Cairo awaiting publication, containing thirty new verses by Empedocles: yet another proof of the interest aroused by this philosopher, whose work continued to be copied even centuries after his death.

[16] See Hippocrates *Vet. med.* 20.

[17] Specifically, Aristophanes accounts for proto-humans as self-sufficient spheres that were then cut into two, a male and a female being, who come together thanks to the influence of erotic Love (*Symp*. 189d 5–191d 5). In this account Plato is reminiscent of Empedocles' hypothesis of the origin of men and women as the result of the separation of proto-human and asexual whole-natured beings (B 62 [= EMP D 157 Laks-Most]); see O'Brien (2002).

[18] To recall just two, the depiction of the cosmos in the *Timaeus* echoes the description of the Sphairos of Empedocles: both are spherical, symmetrical, unique, in no need of human limbs and happy. See Plat. *Tim*. 34b and Empedocles B 27 (= EMP D 89 Laks-Most), B 28 (= EMP D 90 Laks-Most) and B 29 (= EMP D 92 Laks-Most). On Empedocles' Sphairos, see my investigation in Chapter 4.3. Second, the theory of the composition of bodily tissues in the *Timaeus* displays undeniable Empedoclean influences. In fact, both Timaeus and Empedocles postulate that tissues such as marrow, bone and flesh are proportioned mixtures of the four elements. Most remarkably, the composition of blood in Empedocles, which is the tissue through which we think and know, is comparable to that of marrow for Timaeus (in 73b–c), which is the first and basic tissue and is a composition of most harmoniously mixed elements. Plato's Empedoclean reminiscences in the *Timaeus* have been well examined, see Bignone (1916: *Appendice* IV). According to Taylor (1928: 11), the *Timaeus* is 'a deliberate attempt to amalgamate Pythagorean religion and mathematics with

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myths on the ultramundane journeys of souls, which are very likely reminiscent of Empedocles' story of the guilty gods and doctrine of rebirth.[19]

Similarly, Empedocles also excited great interest within the Peripatetic school. Aristotle (384–322 BCE) mentions no other philosopher with greater frequency, except Plato. While his criticism includes several Empedoclean theories, ranging from his conception of the elements and their generation to his theory of motion, his debt to Empedocles, and in particular to his biological theories, is undeniable. Among the first Peripatetics, moreover, Theophrastus (ca. 369–ca. 285 BCE) dedicates a long section of *On the Senses* to challenging the theories of Empedocles on sense organs, perception and knowledge acquisition and, if we are to judge from what is preserved of this work, with the exception of his treatment of Democritus, the section dedicated to Empedocles is Theophrastus' longest and most comprehensive discussion of his predecessors.

While Stoics and Epicureans were also influenced by Empedocles,[20] engagement with his philosophy continued in commentaries written on Plato's dialogues and Aristotle's works as well as by the early Christians into late antiquity. In particular, two of the most important sources for Empedocles' fragments should be mentioned. First, Plutarch (ca. 45–ca. 125 CE) is credited with a major work on Empedocles in ten books, which is a strong indication, together with his numerous Empedoclean quotations, that Empedocles' poems were held in high esteem by him.[21] Second, the Neoplatonist and Aristotelian commentator Simplicius (ca. 480–ca. 560 CE) almost certainly had access to a large part, probably all, of Empedocles' physical poem. This is shown

Empedoclean biology'. Cornford (1937), too, saw Empedoclean influences in several passages of the *Timaeus*; e.g., at 32c. Moreover, Solmsen (1950: esp. 446–58) is important for an assessment of Empedocles' influence on Timaeus' views on tissues of the human body. See also Guthrie (1965: 217) for '*Timaeus* ow[ing] an obvious debt to Empedocles'. Similarly, O'Brien (1969: 22–23, 144–45). For an opposing attempt to diminish the weight and value of Empedocles' influence on Plato's *Timaeus*, see Hershbell (1974). *Contra*, see the recent article by Hladký (2015: 73–82).

[19] As we will see especially in Chapter 3.3.1.

[20] On the one hand, Hermarchus (third century BCE), disciple of Epicurus and his successor as head of the Epicurean school, is said to have written a treatise *Against Empedocles* in twenty-two books (see Obbink [1988]), while it is renowned that the Latin poet Lucretius (first century BCE) praised Empedocles' poetical abilities and his *De Rerum Natura* was also reminiscent of several of Empedocles' philosophical theories (Furley [1970], Sedley [1989, 1998, 2003], Garani [2007] and, more recently, Nethercut [2017]). On the other hand, Galen, *Plac. Hipp.* Plat. 3.3.25 and 3.5.22 tells us that the Stoic Chrysippus (ca. 281–ca. 208 BCE) cited and interpreted passages of Empedocles' poem, whereas Cicero, *Ad Quest.* 2.9.3 compares Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* with an *Empedoclea* composed by a certain Sallustius – possibly a translation or interpretation of Empedocles' work: see Sedley (1989: 269).

[21] Plutarch's work on Empedocles is listed in the so-called Lamprias *Catalogue* of Plutarch's writings, number 43. It is also mentioned by Hipp. *Ref.* 5.20.6.

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by the extent of Simplicius' Empedoclean quotations, which account for nearly 8 per cent of the whole poem and include over 150 verses or part verses, often repeating them.[22] Additionally, Simplicius' familiarity with Empedocles' work is also shown by the fact that he often cites verses together with a precise reference to the parts and books of *On Nature* from which they are derived.[23] This is evidence that in late antiquity Empedocles continued to arouse interest among philosophers, who still cared to copy and cite his work.

Lastly, Empedocles' great fascination endures even in the modern era. For instance, the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843) wrote an unfinished tragedy concerning the legendary death of Empedocles,[24] while the crucial role that Presocratic thought, and that of Empedocles in particular, played in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) is well recognized and studied.[25] All of this serves to display the sheer appeal and popularity the challenging philosophy of Empedocles and his curious personality have always and consistently wielded. In short, the number of open questions his work still raises, his status as a thinker who prompts reassessment of what we mean in the first place by 'early Greek philosophy' and his important legacy for later thinkers all ensure that his thought still wields an enduring claim on our attention today.

The starting point of the present study is a critical approach towards the traditional criteria according to which scholars have attributed Empedocles' fragments to *On Nature* and the *Purifications*. These criteria can be traced back to the nineteenth century with the work of H. Stein, whose division of Empedoclean fragments between *On Nature* and the *Purifications* was essentially taken up by H. Diels first in his 1901 *Poetarum Philosophorum Fragmenta* and then in *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* in 1903. The latter work, which soon became the reference edition for early Greek philosophers, ended up defining a standard strategy in dealing with Empedocles' alleged doctrinal antinomy. As only a few of the extent fragments are explicitly assigned by our sources to either poem,[26] Diels considered verses related to the story of the guilty gods, individual

[22] Most notably, B 17.7–8 (= EMP D 73.240–1) are repeated as many as half a dozen times: see O'Brien (1969: 150).

[23] For instance, we owe to him the precious evidence, among various other indications, that B 17 (= EMP D 73.233–66 Laks-Most) comes from the first book of the physical poem: see *Phys*. 157, 25 Diels.

[24] *Tod des Empedokles*. See Primavesi (2014). [25] See Most (2005) and Rapp (2011).

[26] DK 31 B 1 (= EMP D 41 Laks-Most), B 8 (= EMP D 53 Laks-Most), B 17 (= EMP D 73.233–66 Laks-Most), B 34 (= EMP D 71 Laks-Most), B 62 (= EMP D 157 Laks-Most), B 96 (= EMP D 192 Laks-Most), B 103 (= EMP D 242 Laks-Most) and B 134 (= EMP D 93 Laks-Most) are explicitly connected

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rebirth and purificatory rules as distinct from verses of a more physical character, connected to the four elements and the two forces of Love and Strife, the cosmic cycle, the origin and development of our world, zoogony, anthropogony, biology and epistemology. According to this standard, Diels reconstructed Empedocles' thought into two profoundly different poems: the *Purifications* were made a religious composition, whereas *On Nature* became a work dealing with topics that Diels considered appropriate to fifth-century natural philosophy. The apparently contradictory nature of Empedocles' poems that resulted from this reconstruction was then explained away by his 'spiritual development'.[27] According to Diels, Empedocles devoted his youth to physical research and writing *On Nature*, but it was only later, when oppressed by the pains of old age and the further misfortune of exile,[28] that he finally turned to religious consolation and wrote his *Purifications*.[29] The subjective character of this hypothesis, which nonetheless knew a considerable following, is displayed by the fact that the direction of Empedocles' spiritual development could be reversed at will and so a few scholars argued that he wrote his *Katharmoi* when he was a 'young prophet', and turned to physical topics when he became old and disillusioned.[30]

The first substantial criticism against the assumption of Empedocles' doctrinal conflict came from Kahn in his foundational study of 1960. By emphasizing that the antinomy between Empedoclean religious and physical interests cannot be resolved by assuming a difference in date and outlook between the two poems, Kahn observed that the religious poem presupposes Empedocles' physics. For instance, Empedocles employs the scenario of the four elements as places in the world where the guilty gods are compelled to wander (B 115 [= EMP D 10 Laks-Most]). Moreover, he depicts the powers of Love and Strife upon the guilty gods as functioning in the same way as they work upon the elements within the physical fragments. Above all, Kahn highlighted that Empedocles' conception of the principle of Love as a complex reality, 'at once physical and spiritual', is

with *On Nature*, whereas only B 112 (= EMP D 4 Laks-Most) and F 26 Mansfeld-Primavesi (= EMP D 37 Laks-Most) are quoted as coming from the *Purifications*.

[27] The definition is by Kahn (1960: 5).

[28] There is no sure evidence that Empedocles was exiled. However, this may be implied from the reference to his κάθοδος in Diog. Laert. 8.67 and from the fact that in B 112 (= EMP D 4 Laks-Most) Empedocles describes himself as one who travels from city to city, whereas in B 115: 13–14 (= EMP D 10.13–14 Laks-Most) he describes himself as an exile from the gods.

[29] Diels (1898: 406). See also Wilamowitz (1929: 655–6).

[30] According to Bidez (1894: 159–74) and Kranz (1935: 111–9). On the subjective nature of these interpretations see Primavesi (2013: 669).

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substantially unchanged between the *Purifications* and *On Nature* and this makes the two poems fundamentally compatible with each other.[31]

Additionally, Kahn showed that the physical poem is also a profoundly religious work. In fact, the form of *On Nature* suggests the spirit of mysterious revelation entrusted to his disciple Pausanias, to whom the physical poem is dedicated and who is urged to keep it 'mute in his heart'.[32] This invites the reading of a 'preliminary initiation, which reserves the final disclosure for a later ἐποπτεία'.[33] Moreover, Kahn argued that the doctrinal content of the physical poem also betrays 'a religious orientation', with Empedocles' prayer to the gods and the Muse (B 3 [= EMP D 44 Laks-Most]), his belief in life after death as well as in evil and the good things that come with it (B 15 [= EMP D 52 Laks-Most]) and, even more remarkably, with his promise to teach his disciple how to control the forces of nature (B 111 [= EMP D 43 Laks-Most]).[34] Thus, as Kahn concluded, 'there is no room for a "conversion" between the physical poem and the *Purifications*, for the author of *On Nature* is already a religious mystic who hints at his belief in immortality'.[35]

Kahn's pivotal revision opened a new pathway in Empedocles studies. Scholars gradually dismissed as anachronistic the nineteenth-century assumption that the philosopher's physical theories and religious interests were incompatible and began instead to look at points of contact between them. Indeed, scholars have made headway in showing that the different areas of Empedocles' thought are not contradictory but display striking analogies. This innovative approach has its most radical representatives in C. Rowett and P. Kingsley. Yet, by working on the analogous premise of superseding the dualism between Empedocles the systematic, rational philosopher and Empedocles the religious mystic, they came up with substantially different conclusions.

On the one hand, in a 1987 article, Rowett argued for a rejection not merely of the idea of Empedocles as a divided character, but even of the tradition of Empedocles as author of two poems.[36] Specifically, Rowett challenged the common view that ancient sources that name *Purifications* and *On Nature* in connection to Empedocles' verses refer therewith to two separate poems. She pointed out that no ancient authors quoting Empedocles describe the work from which they quote,

[31] Kahn (1960: 24).
[32] B 5 (= EMP D 258 Laks-Most). See also B 111.2 (= EMP D 43.2 Laks-Most). [33] Kahn (1960: 8).
[34] Ibid. 7–8. [35] Ibid. 10.
[36] Rowett's hypothesis was embraced by Inwood in his 1992 edition of Empedocles' fragments (revised in 2001).

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none are concerned to distinguish poems of different content, none use both 'physika' and 'katharmoi' as titles nor mention any distinction between the titles in terms of the subject matter of the poem and none summarize or describe the general content of the poem designated by the title used.[37] Thus, Rowett concludes that, in line with the practice in antiquity of occasionally referring to one and the same literary work, or various parts of the same work, by different names, the two titles are alternative ways of naming one and the same poem.

However, the report of Diogenes Laertius (8.77), τὰ μὲν οὖν Περὶ φύσεως αὐτῷ καὶ οἱ Καθαρμοὶ εἰς ἔπη τείνουσι πεντακισχίλια ('the books of *On Nature* and the *Katharmoi* span five thousand lines in all'), challenges Rowett's reconstruction. Here Empedocles' two poems are mentioned in one breath in relation to their total number of verses. Moreover, a few chapters before, Diogenes Laertius quoted not only the opening lines of the *Purifications* (B 112 [= EMP D 4 Laks-Most]), where Empedocles addresses his fellow citizens of Agrigento, but also the dedicatory line of *On Nature*, in which he speaks to his disciple Pausanias (B 1 [= EMP D 41 Laks-Most]).[38] This suggests that Diogenes Laertius is aware not merely of Empedocles' different titles, but also of separate works that he distinguishes in terms of their address. Thus, as Kingsley explains, although Rowett's hypothesis remains 'a theoretical possibility . . . we are obliged on balance to accept what Diogenes says in the absence of any genuine reasons for doubting him'.[39] This leaves the hypothesis that Empedocles wrote two poems. Nevertheless, Rowett's reconstruction has the merit of having questioned the long-standing distribution of Empedocles' fragments between the two, highlighting that it was grounded on an anachronistic nineteenth-century reconstruction of Empedocles' doctrinal dualism.

On the other hand, in his 1995 book, Kingsley approached Empedocles' thought from a perspective that aimed to encompass 'unorthodox' elements, such as magic, but ended up dismissing any genuine interest in natural philosophy or physics by Empedocles. Kingsley argued that, since Empedocles' self-definition as an *iatromantis* was in accord with the agonistic and pragmatic context in which he worked,[40] he was simply an itinerant purifier, similar to an oriental *magos.* Kingsley's approach has the merit of having highlighted, through a meticulous analysis of different

[37] Rowett (1987a: 27). [38] Diog. Laert. 8.54.
[39] Kingsley (1995: 363–64). Against Rowett's reconstruction, see also Sedley (1989: 270–76), Edwards (1991: 283 n.6) and Primavesi (2006b, 2007, 2013: 681–82, 685–89).
[40] See also Gemelli Marciano (2002: 106–7).

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kinds of sources, that magic is among Empedocles' concerns; yet his dismissal of the philosopher's genuine interest in natural philosophy is as inadequate in the description of fifth-century thought as were nineteenth-century standpoints.

In contrast, my approach avoids unilateral and radical classifications and assumes, instead, that fifth-century thought, and Empedocles' philosophy in particular, consisted of a synergy among natural philosophy and concerns for more religious beliefs and ritual purity, and that it can even extend, as Kingsley showed, to include magic. For this reason, my investigation makes extensive use of the background in which Empedocles lived and worked and of the relationships he established with traditional ideas as well as with the innovative thought of his time. His fragments will thus be contextualized in their poetical, religious, intellectual and historical settings and also considered in light of their legacy to later thought. For instance, Chapter 2 investigates diverse aspects of lyric poetry, which illuminates the interpretation of several elements included in Empedocles' proem to *On Nature*. Chapter 3 draws attention to Empedocles' verses in dialogue with Plato, Pythagoras and later Platonizing interpretations, while Chapter 6 explores Empedocles' epistemological views in relation to other early Greek epistemic reflections, notably those of Xenophanes, Alcmaeon, the Hippocratic author of *Ancient Medicine* and Parmenides. In addition, epic poetry, especially Homer and Hesiod, reports on legendary or semi-legendary characters and trends of thought expressed by new rituals and cults are also considered throughout.

Beyond this contested background, a key point in the history of Empedocles studies for reconsidering his thought (and, as we shall see, for reconstructing his physical poem) occurred in 1999, when an extraordinary publication entered the scene via a previously unknown papyrus. This had been bought at the beginning of the twentieth century by the *Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg*, but was entrusted many years later to A. Martin and O. Primavesi for study and publication.[41] From its fifty-two fragments, each containing no more than a few letters, Martin and Primavesi reconstructed eleven *ensembles*, classified in alphabetical order,[42] which attest over seventy-four lines of Empedocles' physical poem. In the first visible lines of the first column of *ensemble* a, nine verses can be read,

[41] Martin-Primavesi (1999).

[42] That is, *ensembles* a–k: see Martin-Primavesi (1999: 3–6). In a seminal 2004 article, Janko proposed that *ens.* c belongs to the same papyrus section as *ens.* a, representing its immediate continuation, while *ens.* f was shown to be the inferior and right portion of the same column attested by *ens.* d. Janko's reconstruction is endorsed by Primavesi (2008a).

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which Simplicius quoted as coming from the first book of Empedocles' *On Nature* (DK 31 B 17 [= EMP D 73. 233–66 Laks-Most]).[43]

The Strasbourg papyrus thus returns an integral piece of the direct tradition of Empedocles and, therewith, pre-Socratic philosophy.[44] Furthermore, it bears important evidence that, if correctly understood, supports a rethinking of Empedocles' thought in terms of his doctrinal unity, as well as a new reconstruction of the fragments within *On Nature*. Specifically, *ens*. d–f displays two remarkable lines dealing with the consumption of food deemed unfit for eating and the painful fate deriving from eating it.[45] These lines were already known from a quotation by Porphyry,[46] and because of their religious character, all pre-papyrus editors allocated them within the *Purifications*.[47] Yet the direct tradition unquestionably shows that Empedocles' physics included purificatory material; indeed, religious lines with a strongly purificatory connotation are integrated within a physical discourse in the first book of *On Nature*.[48] This evidence highlights the need to rethink the topics and scope of Empedocles' physical poem and, more generally, of fifth-century natural philosophy as a whole.

While the papyrus evidence has inevitably lent new popularity to Rowett's hypothesis that Empedocles was the author of just one poem,[49] for those post-papyrus editors who do not undermine the report of our sources (especially Diogenes Laertius, as mentioned above) and consequently assume that Empedocles wrote two works, the Strasbourg papyrus should have led to a reconsideration of the criteria according to which they allocate Empedocles' fragments between *On Nature* and the *Purifications*. Yet the significance of this evidence for a new apportioning of the fragments and, consequently, for a novel reconstruction of Empedocles' poems has been overlooked. Indeed, although the first editors

[43] *Phys*. 157, 25 Diels.

[44] However, Kingsley (2002: 334) is skeptical about the novelty represented by the papyrus verses:

> over half of them tell us little or nothing new: around 27 of them either are lines of Empedocles' poetry already known from other sources or have been painstakingly reconstructed by editors in detailed imitation of lines we already knew. This leaves us with only about 25 lines of which we can say that they offer us the promise of something genuinely fresh in terms of substance and content . . . what is so striking here, when all has been said and done is how little fresh information these fresh lines contain.

[45] PStrasb. d–f 5–6 (= EMP D 76. 5–6 Laks-Most): 'Alas that the pitiless day did not destroy me earlier, / before I contrived terrible deeds about feeding with my claws'.

[46] *De Abst*. 2.31 = B 139 (= EMP D 34 Laks-Most).

[47] With the exception of van der Ben (1975), whose reconstruction will be discussed further below.

[48] For a thorough discussion of the Strasbourg papyrus with reference to this topic, see Chapter 1.1.

[49] On Rowett's hypothesis, see above. This is now advocated by Inwood (2001), Trépanier (2004), Janko (2005) and McKirahan (2010: 230–92).

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of the Strasbourg papyrus recommended reconstructing within the physical poem[50] the reference to rebirth and, therefore, the story of the gods being exiled to earth and reborn as mortal beings (notably the story narrated in B 115 [= EMP D 10 Laks-Most]), from 2001 onwards Primavesi has vehemently advocated the conservative hypothesis that B 115 (= EMP D 10 Laks-Most) belongs to the *Purifications*. This conclusion has since been followed by all editors who argue for two poems.[51]

However, as D. Sedley has pointed out,[52] this stance created a curious scenario in Empedocles studies. On the one hand, the old dogma that Empedocles' physical and religious doctrines belong to distinct areas of his thought has now been discredited as an anachronistic imposition on fifth-century thought. On the other hand, 'the conventional apportionment of fragments between the two poems, which was founded on that dogma, remains largely unchallenged, as if it had some independent authority'.[53] In Chapter 1 I will show that it has none. Thus, by paying due attention to the Strasbourg evidence, the first two chapters of this book fundamentally challenge the standard apportionment of extant fragments between *On Nature* and the *Purifications* and in contrast offer an original version of the proem to *On Nature*, which includes topics and verses dealing with the story of the guilty gods and rebirth.

Because my reconstruction of the proem to *On Nature* includes many of the topics and verses that have traditionally been attributed to the *Purifications*, especially those that focus on the exile of the *daimon* and Empedocles' doctrine of rebirth, a question may arise as to what I take the *Purifications* to be in terms of its content and intent. For this reason, it is worth briefly setting out my stance. In this regard, I have considerable sympathy with the hypothesis of Sedley that the *Purifications* were originally a collection of heterogeneous material, of ritual oracles and healing utterances as well as purificatory rules for everyday life.[54] Specifically, Sedley notes that this hypothesis is suggested by the verses introducing the *Purifications*, B 112 (= EMP D 4 Laks-Most),[55] through which

[50] Martin-Primavesi (1999: e.g., 113).

[51] Or at least by all of them that I am aware of: Tonelli (2002), Bollack (2003), Vítek (2006), Gemelli Marciano (2009), Graham (2010), Montevecchi (2010), Mansfeld-Primavesi (2011 and 2021) and Laks-Most (2016). Although in his 2004 reconstruction of Empedocles' fragments, Trépanier argues for only one poem, in later contributions, by remarking on the need to read Empedocles' physics and doctrine of rebirth as aspiring to theoretical unity, he stresses the point of B 115 (=EMP D 10 Laks-Most) having its place in Empedocles' physics – see, e.g., Trépanier (2014: 174, 2017a: 165).

[52] Sedley (1989). [53] Ibid. 271. [54] Sedley (1989: 271–73).

[55] According to Diog. Laert. 8.54, B 112 (= EMP D 4 Laks-Most) constitutes the proem to the *Purifications*. For a detailed interpretation of this fragment, see Chapter 1.4.

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Empedocles tells us that wherever he goes, people keep asking 'where their advantage lies, some seeking prophecies, others, long pierced by harsh pains, ask to hear the word of healing for all kinds of illnesses'.[56] As Sedley argues, in light of the programmatic character of these introductory lines, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the *Purifications* were simply a response to 'these requests, a set of purificatory oracles and "healing utterances"'.[57]

In this regard, Sedley shows that those scant fragments that our sources attributed to the *Purifications* or can be considered as part of them by virtue of their content agree with this conclusion. Two fragments are explicitly connected with Empedocles' *Purifications* by our sources, but they are highly fragmentary and for this reason difficult to contextualize. One fragment focuses on plants with dense roots and rare shoots,[58] whereas the other fragment consists of just three words, 'seven times seven', which our source connects with the notion that the foetus is completely formed after seven weeks.[59] Admittedly, there is little to be inferred in terms of content and context from these quotations, but it is not impossible to assume, as Sedley does, that they did not contain any discursive exposition on plants or embryology/childbirth, simply offering instructions for purifications that include the medical and even magical power of some plants, or mystical utterances (as 'seven times seven' seems to be) useful 'in the course of a purificatory advice' concerning childbirth.[60]

Other sets of verses, which are not explicitly connected to the *Purifications* by our sources but can nonetheless be attributed to this poem, consist of what seem to be ritual prescriptions of abstinence from some kinds of food, notably laurel leaves or beans, or advice on abstaining from evil actions.[61] Lastly, Theon of Smyrna[62] quotes some Empedoclean words, involving five springs and the 'indestructible bronze' that must be used to cut something, in connection with a purificatory and mysterious context, which indicates that they might originally be part of some ritual/purificatory utterances. From all these instances, as Sedley concludes, the idea we gain about the *Purifications* is not that of a discursive exposition of Empedocles' doctrine of rebirth, but rather a collection of heterogeneous material including instructions for rituals, healing advice and purificatory oracles.

[56] The translation is by Wright (1995: 264). [57] Sedley (1989: 271–72).
[58] F 26 Mansfeld-Primavesi (= EMP D 37 Laks-Most).
[59] ἐν ἑπτὰ ἑβδομάσιν: B 153a (not in Laks-Most). The source is Theon of Smyrna 104.1 Hill.
[60] Sedley (1989: 272).
[61] See B 140 (= EMP D 32 Laks-Most), B 141 (= EMP D 31 Laks-Most) and B 144 (= EMP D 33 Laks-Most).
[62] Theo. Smyrn. 15.7 Hill. (= B 143 [= EMP D 35 Laks-Most]).

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Finally, Sedley shows that this conclusion is supported by three further reports of *Katharmoi* as a kind of composition.[63] The first is with reference to Epimenides of Crete (seventh century BCE), a semi-legendary figure of a purifier, who is credited with the composition of a work entitled *Purifications*.[64] We do not have any specific indications of what this work was about but, considering Epimenides' fame as a purifier and the report Plutarch offers of him as a man 'learned in religion in the sphere connected with divination and initiatory rites' (ἐνθουσιαστικὴ καὶ τελεστικὴ σοφία),[65] it can be assumed that his *Purifications* were a heterogeneous set of purificatory advices, divinatory utterances and oracles useful in initiatory rites. Second, a line from the pseudo-Pythagorean *Golden Verses* reads: 'but abstain from the food that I spoke of in my *Katharmoi* and *Absolution of the Soul*',[66] which clearly connects these kinds of compositions with abstention from certain sorts of food and some ritual 'absolutions' – themes that are associated with Empedocles' *Purifications* too, as we have just seen. Third, in the *Frogs* 1033, the remark of the comic poet Aristophanes on Musaeus' expertise in 'healing and oracles' is glossed by the scholiast with the information that Musaeus 'composes absolutions, initiations and *katharmoi*' (DK 2 A 6 [not in Laks-Most]). The legendary figure of Musaeus was famous in antiquity as a chresmologist or 'oracle-gatherer', namely 'a man who went about looking for people who would reward him for reciting to them oracles which he knew and which had a bearing on their affairs'[67] – a description that could be appropriate to Empedocles too who, as we have seen above, wanders from city to city, giving profitable oracles, advice and healing utterances and receiving for this divine honours from people (B 112 [= EMP D 4 Laks-Most]).

Thus, compositions called *Purifications* are clearly linked with collections of ritual advices, healing oracles and purificatory utterances. The answer then, in terms of what I take Empedocles' *Purifications* to be, is that, as Sedley showed, this poem and *On Nature* are distinct works not in terms of their content (philosophy vs. religion) or addressees (Pausanias vs. citizens of Acragas; that is, an esoteric vs. exoteric poem),[68] but rather on the formal

[63] Sedley (1989: 273–74). [64] DK 3 A 2–3 (not in Laks-Most). [65] Plut. *Sol.* 12.7.

[66] *Car. Aur.* 67f. Sedley also highlights that three lines later the author concludes this composition with ἔσσεαι ἀθάνατος θεὸς ἄμβροτος, οὐκέτι θνητός, which is a clear reminiscence of Empedocles' opening of the *Purifications* at B 112.4 (= EMP D 4.4 Laks-Most).

[67] West (1983: 40).

[68] Although the second person singular is generally used as a criterion for attributing the fragments to the physical poem, the impotence of this criterion is demonstrated by Rowett (1987a: 31–32), Sedley (1989: 273 with n.17) and Inwood (2001: 15 n.34). Thus, in Chapter 2 my reconstruction of the

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level of their composition. That is, whereas the *Purifications* are a collection of heterogeneous and rather brief sayings, *On Nature* is a doctrinal exposition[69] in which, as I show in this book, religious concerns related to the doctrine of rebirth and purifications are central to understanding Empedocles' physical system.

In setting out this main argument, the first two chapters of this book will work together to demonstrate that verses related to Empedocles' fault, punishment, exile and rebirths, starting from B 115 (= EMP D 10 Laks-Most) and continuing with all other fragments related to it (the so-called demonological fragments), are integral to the proem to *On Nature*. In this respect, my reconstruction of the introductory section of the physical poem shares similarities with that by N. van der Ben, who in 1975 allocated the story of the guilty gods in B 115 (= EMP D 10 Laks-Most) and several other fragments related to it to the opening section of Empedocles' physical poem. However, van der Ben's reconstruction of the proemial fragments failed to gain a following, as his interpretation of both the story of the guilty gods and Empedocles' cosmos were fervidly criticized as an anachronistic attempt to explain Empedocles in Neoplatonic terms. Specifically, on the one hand, van der Ben rejected the cyclical interpretation of Empedocles' cosmic cycle which, as D. O'Brien demonstrated,[70] is indicated by both Empedocles' own words and their earliest interpreters, such as Plato and Aristotle.[71] On the other hand, van der Ben's interpretation of B 115 (= EMP D 10 Laks-Most) also betrays a strongly Neoplatonist connotation that is clearly anachronistic when applied to Empedocles.[72] Thus, in his 1981 essay dedicated to a detailed criticism of van der Ben's study, O'Brien restored the importance of the cyclical description of the cosmos in Empedocles' system as well as the need to read his philosophy without turning the history of ancient thought upside down.[73] In doing so, O'Brien rejected van der Ben's reconstruction of the proem to *On Nature* in favour of Diels' apportionment of the fragments. However, his rejection of van der Ben's allocation of B 115 (= EMP D 10 Laks-Most) within

opening verses of *On Nature* is based on the assumption that Empedocles, in his physical poem, shifts the addressee turning to different interlocutors.

[69] If I may make a rather daring comparison, I would say that the *Purifications* are to *On Nature* what Hesiod's *Days* are to his *Work* or, even better, to his *Theogony*: a collection of heterogeneous advice on the one hand and a discursive, didactic narrative on the other.

[70] With his monumental book on Empedocles' cosmic cycle in 1969 and again in a 1981 essay that is dedicated to a rejection of van der Ben's hypothesis.

[71] On this, see Chapter 7.1. [72] See O'Brien (1981: 73–90).

[73] Ibid. 90, where O'Brien concludes that B 115 (= EMP D 10 Laks-Most) could only be part of the physical poem if the history of ancient philosophy is turned upside down.

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Empedocles' physical poem draws on a reading of its *testimonia* that has become problematic – not to say untenable – in light of the Strasbourg papyrus, as I will show in Chapter 1.

In this respect, Chapter 1 will show first how the papyrus evidence changes the way we approach our secondary sources for B 115 (= EMP D 10 Laks-Most), none of which can now be taken as evidence for the attribution of this fragment to the *Purifications*. Second, the recent suggestion that the attribution of B 115 (= EMP D 10 Laks-Most) to the religious poem is corroborated by reasons of similar content with the proem to the *Purifications*, and by the assumption that *On Nature* contains no hints at Empedocles' divine nature,[74] is demonstrably flawed. Third, the attribution of B 115 (= EMP D 10 Laks-Most) to the physical poem is established by PStrasb. d–f 3–10 (= EMP D 76.3–10), which is an internal echo, indeed a literary allusion, to the story of Empedocles' guilt and punishment narrated in B 115 (= EMP D 10 Laks-Most). Thus, in order to make sense of the content of these papyrus verses and their poetic function, B 115 (= EMP D 10 Laks-Most) needs to precede them in the poem, while Plutarch tells us that its lines constitute the prelude to the doctrine proper. The inference is that the story of the guilty gods and Empedocles' claim that he is one of them belongs to the proem to *On Nature*.

Having then shown that a reappraisal of Empedocles' doctrinal unity is not only prompted by the nature of fifth-century philosophy, but also and above all by Empedocles' physical poem itself, which thematizes topics concerning the consumption of food deemed unfit to be eaten, certain faults very likely related to it and the concept of punishment and rebirth, Chapter 2 will follow up on this conclusion and offer a new sequence of fragments introducing *On Nature*. Having already established in Chapter 1 the allocation of B 115 (= EMP D 10 Laks-Most) at the *incipit* of the physical poem, in Chapter 2 I will then argue that the proem to *On Nature* consists of lines that the sources quoted as closely related to the story of Empedocles' fault, exile and rebirths mentioned in B 115 (= EMP D 10 Laks-Most). This series, commonly known as the demonological fragments and generally reconstructed within the *Purifications*, adds important details to Empedocles' own portrayal as an exceptional individual, by narrating the first leg of his journey of exile as a *katabasis* to the realm of the dead.[75] It will

[74] See Primavesi (2013: e.g., 688).

[75] As early as 1975, van der Ben (e.g., 57–59) suggested that the prologue to Empedocles' *On Nature* begins with his *katabasis*. Zuntz (1971: e.g., 263) also reconstructed Empedocles' *katabasis* out of the

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be argued that, in introducing his physical poem with the narration of an extraordinary journey to the underworld, Empedocles aims at validating his authority on matters beyond ordinary human ken. Additionally, his *katabasis* stages, against a nearly mythical background, his belief in rebirth: it is because he has seen the dead and their destiny in Hades that what he professes concerning the place and destiny of human beings in this world can be trusted as true.

Thus, while the proem to *On Nature* begins with the story of Empedocles' fault and *katabasis*, the second part of Chapter 2 is intended to reconstruct those themes that might have followed this narration. They include traditional topics such as the dedication of his poem to his disciple Pausanias, the invocation to the gods and the Muse and the description of the miserable inanity of ordinary human beings, along with the promise that Pausanias will be able to overcome human condition by following Empedocles' teachings. In addition to traditional proemial fragments, however, my reconstruction of the physical proem is such that it also includes verses on Empedocles' rejection of ritual sacrifices and hints at his concept of rebirth as an integral element of some of his more physical principles. Indeed, I will show the way in which these topics are consistently presented in synergy with the rudiments and the tenet of his physics. In conclusion, we will see that the proem to *On Nature* according to my new reconstruction displays a programmatic structure of a surprising internal coherence, in which religious themes intertwine with physical topics, making sense of many of the most debated and fundamental Empedoclean fragments.

This result is significant for a number of reasons, most importantly because we are dealing with fragments that are crucial for a comprehensive and impartial understanding of Empedocles' thought. A proem so reconstructed then offers us a textual basis to rethink the interrelation and interaction among myth, religion and natural philosophy in Empedocles' physical system. However, it also raises a chain of questions that I will attempt to answer in the rest of the book. In particular, my investigation in Chapters 3 to 7 will build on issues already identified by Warren, but will also extend to include further long-standing and still unresolved questions about the unitary nature of Empedocles' thought and doctrine.

Specifically, in his 2007 work on the pre-Socratics, Warren claimed that, although the diverse aspects of Empedocles' thought and, therefore, the highly heterogeneous material the extant fragments returned to us may

demonological fragments, but claimed this narration constituted the prologue to Empedocles' *Purifications*.

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seem added to one another, it is not really difficult to consider Empedocles' religious interests as part of his physical system.[76] As Warren continued, the real difficulty lies 'in attempting to marry the details of the *daimon*'s story with the cosmological account'. Put another way, it basically means combining the details of Empedocles' belief in rebirth with the principles of his physical system.

In particular, Warren listed some of the most controversial questions that this 'marriage' raises:

> In what ways does the process of reincarnation fit the cosmic change from the Sphere to Love to the factionalized world of Strife and back again? How should we combine the cosmic role of Love and Strife with their roles in the story of the *daimon*? And who, precisely, are the *daimones*? Are all we human beings in fact *daimones* [. . .]? Or are there two races: mortal human beings and *daimones*? Are the gods and the *daimones* the same?[77]

Thus, in addressing Warren's questions via the reconstruction of the fragments offered in Chapters 1 and 2, I will also ask: what role does B 115 (= EMP D 10 Laks-Most) play in the reconstruction of Empedocles' doctrine of rebirth? What is the status of the *daimon* in B 115 (= EMP D 10 Laks-Most) and its relation to individuals (and souls) and gods? In this respect, when can something be said to be divine in Empedocles' system; or, put in more general terms, what is 'godhood' for him? Does his physics, whose tenet entails the negation that something could utterly die, envisage strictly immortal entities alongside beings with a life cycle? Additionally, how can Empedocles' doctrine of rebirth coexist with a physical system that is chiefly materialistic; that is, based on the ratio of fire, air, water and earth? What is behind Empedocles' rejection of birth and death? With specific reference to rebirth, what does this doctrine imply in terms of personal identity and its continuity upon death?

Furthermore, what does Empedocles' revelation of truth entail in terms of the divine knowledge promised to Pausanias? What defines knowledge as divine? What epistemic effort is required of Pausanias and what does it entail for him to gain divine knowledge? Does Empedocles' physics tell us anything about the individual's release from rebirth? Lastly, what is the place of gods and mortals in Empedocles' cosmic cycle? In what ways does the process of rebirth accord with the cosmic change from two consecutive Sphairoi? How could we combine the cosmic role of Love and Strife with their roles in the story of the reincarnated individuals?

[76] Warren (2007: 147). [77] Ibid. 147–48.

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In order to answer questions related more broadly to notions of godhood in Empedocles' physics, Chapters 3 and 4 will be devoted to the exploration of theological issues, which are directly or indirectly connected to his belief in rebirth. The investigation conducted here aims to provide linguistic and conceptual tools crucial to the reconstruction of Empedocles' doctrine of rebirth. It is therefore a necessary groundwork for the restoration of his doctrinal unity, which will be thoroughly undertaken in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

In Chapter 3, I will begin with the analysis of Empedocles' concept of δαίμων (*daimon*) and look at the way in which it delivers important meanings with reference to Empedocles' concept of rebirth. First, it will be shown that the standard interpretation according to which Empedocles' story as an exiled δαίμων is a myth that founds his doctrine of rebirth is flawed. While the core idea behind this interpretation derives from Plutarch's anachronistic reading of the story of the guilty gods, in order to define which notion of δαίμων Empedocles may have had in mind when composing the lines of B 115 (= EMP D 10 Laks-Most), I will look at those texts in which this notion recurs in conjunction with the belief in rebirth: first in Plato's dialogues and then in the Pythagorean fragments. As will be seen, Plato worked on a traditional concept of δαίμονες as divine guides and protectors of souls in this life and beyond, whereas Pythagorean sources exploited the traditional notion of δαίμων as a divine being to articulate a twofold idea: first that Pythagoras was more than an ordinary human being and, second, that a god could exceptionally undergo rebirths, although these are usually reserved for ordinary souls. Following Pythagoras and anticipating Plato my concluding argument in Chapter 3 will be that Empedocles depicts himself as a divine guide and protector of human beings in this world and beyond. In doing so, moreover, he construes his own demonology, which was bound to his doctrine of general rebirth, but never overlapped with it.

After having delved into the concept of δαίμων, its divine status and its role in Empedocles' doctrine of rebirth, Chapter 4 will explore further concepts – mostly introduced in the proemial fragments – that translate Empedocles' notion of godhood. As with Chapter 3, the analysis of Empedocles' key concepts related to the divine offered in Chapter 4 is fundamental background for a comprehensive understanding of his religious thought and for a later evaluation of the import it has on his physical theories. My analysis here will focus on those concepts to which Empedocles explicitly refers as gods, showing that divine entities (such as, for instance, the four elements, Love and Strife, the Sphairos

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and long-lived gods) differ significantly in their divine nature. However, with regard to living beings released from rebirth, we will see that their obtained divinity is based on the characteristics of the Sphairos, the prototype of all integrated entities and the ideal model of the divine. Most importantly, it will be shown that the notion of divinity elaborated with reference to integrated beings is closely related to the antinomy Love/Strife, and this has considerable bearing on the assessment, in Chapter 7, of the mortal/immortal (i.e., rebirth/liberation) dichotomy and its implications in the cosmic cycle.

Once pivotal notions connected with more theological aspects of Empedocles' natural philosophy have been considered and clarified, providing us with the linguistic and conceptual instruments to better understand some of the details of his belief in rebirth, starting with Chapter 5 I will set out a closer exploration of the interconnection of religious and physical principles. To do so, I will incorporate the rest of the proemial section in which themes and motifs related to the doctrine of rebirth are programmatically intertwined with Empedocles' strictly physical tenets. Thus, considering Empedocles' rejection of ordinary notions of birth and death in a group of fragments that make up the final part of the proem of *On Nature*, Chapter 5 will then highlight that this chiefly physical tenet is articulated with his doctrine of rebirth in mind. By expanding on this, it will be shown that Empedocles formulates his notion of elemental mixtures that bring about living beings in terms similar to those used to depict processes of rebirth and this betrays Empedocles' intention to explain his concept of rebirth at the level of physical principles.

Related to this, Chapter 5 will also show that concerns about disembodied existence, individual identity and personal survival upon death are not just added to Empedocles' physical system but are central to it. However, although our extant fragments quite clearly establish continuity of self upon death, foregrounding individuals who are potentially recognizable despite their changed form, scholars generally dismiss the possibility of personal survival, and subsequently of a positive doctrine of rebirth in Empedocles' physical system. For this is thought not to align with his ideas on psychological and mental functions, which are depicted as mechanical processes steered by the body's organs and tissues that dissolve upon death. On the contrary, this chapter will offer an explanation of the way in which Empedocles' conceptualization of rebirth as a series of bodily transformations has led him to marginalize the notion of soul, overlooking a reflection on how the person could persist from an embodied to a disembodied

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state of existence and which role the soul plays in this context. Instead, Empedocles is at ease with a traditional, Homeric and Pythagorean notion of *psyche*, which can not only sustain the notion of disembodied existence, as it stands for personal survival upon the death of the body. It can also be reconciled with the principles of his physics.

While claims to disembodied existence and personal survival are central to Empedocles' physical system, the general aim of *On Nature* is to teach the way to escape rebirth, transcend mortal nature and become a god. Being a god himself, re-born as a 'master of truth',[78] as established in Chapters 2 and 3, Empedocles becomes the teacher of a super-human wisdom, primarily directed to his disciple Pausanias, with the final promise that he will know (and even control) the forces of nature just like a god. Indeed, thanks to Empedocles' philosophy, Pausanias will transcend his mortal nature and become divine. The general aim of Chapter 6 is thus to explore the relationship among true knowledge of the physical world, release from rebirths and the change of one's mortal nature into a divine being.

After investigating what Empedocles could have regarded as divine wisdom, by discussing the most relevant epistemic reflections about human and divine cognitive potential developed in the sixth and fifth century BCE, it will be shown that Empedocles explains the change of being into divine nature at the level of the elements and takes knowledge of the physical world as impacting a person's bodily constitution. The possibility to change one's being is tightly connected to processes of perception, thought and knowledge acquisition which enable us to internalize Empedocles' philosophical revelation and change the elemental mixture of our mind to the point that it will become a divine mind. The possibility of becoming divine through genuine knowledge of the physical world goes along with the training one must undergo to be adequately prepared to receive it. As this training coincides with processes of purification, Empedocles explains from a physiological standpoint how these enable the structure of the elements in our mind to be enhanced to the point where it becomes attuned to the divine. Since purifications are, above all, a means to a more 'religious' purpose – the release of the individual from the chain of rebirths – Empedocles' theory on knowledge acquisition shows how deeply interwoven and mutually enlightening his concept of rebirth and his physics are. Indeed, it is a life of both purity and knowledge

[78] This definition refers to the title of a 1967 essay by Detienne.

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that will allow the person to change to the point where the individual will be ready to be released from rebirths.

Continuing along the line of investigating the relationship between religious doctrines and physical principles, and on this basis establishing the doctrinal unity of Empedocles' philosophy, in Chapter 7 I will turn to the cosmic cycle, with the primary goal of establishing the ways in which it accommodates Empedocles' doctrine of rebirth. After having provided my reconstruction of the cosmic cycle – one of the most controversial issues of Empedocles studies – as a regular alternation of only two phases, Sphairos and Cosmos (thus representing the Empedoclean version of the One/Many problem), I will then explore the place allocated to gods and mortals in it. By concentrating on the metaphorical scenario of the everlasting conflict between Love and Strife, I will argue that, in conformity with traditional anthropogonic accounts, Empedocles describes the history of the world as a series of different ages, in which Strife's miserable humankind replaced a past 'golden' age ruled by Love, whose inhabitants then become gods 'greatest in honours'. This will display the way in which the spatial and conceptual gods/humans antinomy structures the action of Love and Strife in the cycle, thus showing the interconnection between rebirth and physics.

By expanding on this, the final part of Chapter 7 will address the question – already raised by Warren – of whether the function of Love and Strife in the cosmic cycle can be combined with their role in the history of reincarnated individuals. In addressing this issue, two related questions will be examined: first, whether cosmic cycles are morally neutral and, second, whether moral agency has any influence on the shape of our world. By returning to the metaphorical domain of conflict, it will be shown that Empedocles' narrative of the cosmos is set against a strongly moral backdrop. Even more importantly, however, it will be argued that the moral import of the cosmic cycle is intended to ground Empedocles' concept of rebirth on the level of physical principles, thus highlighting that individuals' moral agency has large-scale effects on the cosmos. Against this background, Chapter 7 is the final step towards demonstrating the doctrinal unity of Empedocles' philosophy, establishing that his physics does not merely accommodate, but can even be seen as being premised and structured on his belief in rebirth.

The present book is the outcome of a long project, which has attempted to examine many ingredients of Empedoclean thought, along with their interrelation and interconnection, systematically and within a unified structure. In doing so I have tried, as much as possible, to remain faithful

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to the *ipsissima verba* and to refrain from reading into them modern reconstructions that may have anachronistically imposed on ancient texts the issues, beliefs and even intentions of another time. I will undoubtedly have made mistakes, since a good bit of creativity, and even imagination, is inevitable; indeed, I would say that it is required when making sense of questions for which evidence fails at almost every crucial point.

Nevertheless, by shedding fresh light on old readings, offering new ways to look at long-standing problems and through a constant dialogue with the texts, I hope to reopen discussion on unsettled questions and to challenge received opinions, largely dictated by outdated notions, which have by now been presented as dogmas in the scholarly debate. In doing so, I make no claim to cover all the issues surrounding Empedocles' philosophy or to offer a final word on those I do consider. Rather, this book wishes to be seen as a voice, among many other voices, in an ongoing conversation about the way we understand early Greek philosophy and its legacy in the history of ancient thought as a whole. Instead of offering limiting solutions, therefore, I hope that it will continue to prompt new questions and to highlight, in turn, the challenging and, therefore, extremely engaging legacy of Empedocles, whose philosophy still repays study today.

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