

ONE

EMPEDOCLES



EMPEDOCLES OLYMPIAN

Empedocles' dive into Etna has fascinated scholars, poets, and artists from ancient to modern times. Diogenes Laertius was so taken with it, in fact, that he gives two versions of the event. Biographically speaking, the story becomes even more fascinating as it becomes ever more clear that Empedocles was destined to leave the world precisely in this manner, his fate determined by biographers and historians and ultimately through his own writing. Empedocles' philosophical works, the *Purifications* and the *Physics*, were considered raw autobiographical data fit for the gleaning, and the manner in which Empedocles' philosophy was transformed into his biography reveals more about ancient biographers, such as Diogenes Laertius, than it does about Empedocles. Out of the philosophy itself grew a legend that has haunted and intrigued us through the years.

There was a tendency in the ancient world, by no means restricted to the biographers, to approach any given text as biographical.¹ The poets were favorite subjects of this approach: Homer's life was pieced together

from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; Aeschylus was presumed to have fought at Salamis because he describes that battle in his *Persians*.² The same is true of the philosophers in general, and for Empedocles and other archaic philosophers specifically, because of their use of the first-person “I” in their work. For our purposes, the pursuit of a biographical tradition that emerges from a philosopher’s work, the life of Empedocles is particularly instructive. First, because Empedocles was such a popular figure for the biographers, they have given us an enormous amount of biography to work with. Second and fortunately, a great deal of Empedocles’ own philosophy is still extant, so that the two bodies of work, biography and philosophy, are available for comparative work to illustrate the method. Keeping in step, then, with Empedocles’ biography as it occurs in Diogenes Laertius, we begin with his origin and background, all of which lead, inexorably, to that fateful final jump.

The Philosopher at the Games

The archaic philosopher Empedocles was a famous man from a famous town. A citizen of Acragas in Sicily, Empedocles flourished in the early middle of the fifth century BCE, during the great age of Sicilian tyrants, Hieron of Syracuse and Theron, also of Acragas.³ Acragas (modern-day Agrigento) was prosperous and strong, as was most of Sicily during this era; the tyrants Hieron and Theron were as celebrated for their beneficent and prosperous rule as for their victories in the Olympic Games on the Greek mainland.⁴ The association between Empedocles’ fellow Sicilians and the Olympic Games led to an association between Olympia and Empedocles himself. This has caused a great deal of confusion when it comes to determining Empedocles’ family in the biographies and, to a certain extent, in attribution of his work.⁵

According to most ancient sources, Empedocles was the son of a man named Meton. The philosopher’s grandfather and son were also named Empedocles; it was common practice for the ancient Greeks to name sons and daughters for grandparents. A dissenting view, however, gives Exaenetus as the name of Empedocles’ father and of his son. The presence of different family names are not unusual in these biographies; several different names are given for Heraclitus’ and Democritus’ fathers as well. Variant family names do suggest, however, variant purposes, one other than biography. For example, we could expect the name Exaenetus to appear somewhere in Empedocles’ philosophical works, just as the name Cleis,

which occurs in one of Sappho's poems, is sometimes considered Sappho's daughter by the biographers and later, as the biography takes on a life and a tradition of its own, "Cleis" was given as the name of Sappho's mother, thus imposing traditional nomenclature practice for a biographical purpose.⁶ Biographical motives are also at work in different names given for members of Empedocles' family. The several sources that give these different names were collected by Diogenes Laertius in his life of Empedocles, and presented to the reader as follows:

1. Empedocles [the philosopher], according to Hippobotus, was the son of Meton and the grandson of Empedocles of Acragas. Timaeus says the same in the fifteenth book of his *Histories*, and that the grandfather of the poet [philosopher] was a man of distinction. And Hermippus agrees with this also. So too Heraclides in his work, *On Diseases*, [says] that Empedocles was from a distinguished family and had a grandfather who kept race horses. And Eratosthenes in his records, *Olympic Victories*, says that Meton's father was the winner in the Seventy-First Olympiad, and uses Aristotle as his reference. Apollodorus the grammarian in his *Chronology* tells us that he [the philosopher] was the son of Meton . . . and he says that the victor in the horse-riding in the Seventy-First Olympiad was this man's namesake and grandfather. (DL 8.51–52)

Ἐμπεδοκλῆς, ὡς φησιν Ἰππόβοτος, Μέτωνος ἦν υἱὸς τοῦ Ἐμπεδοκλέους Ἀκραγαντίνου. τὸ δ' αὐτὸ καὶ Τίμαιος ἐν τῇ πεντεκαιδεκάτῃ τῶν Ἱστοριῶν [fr. 93 FHG I 215] <λέγει προοιστορῶν> ἐπίσημον ἄνδρα γεγονέναι τὸν Ἐμπεδοκλέα τὸν πάππον τοῦ ποιητοῦ. ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἑρμιππος [fr. 27 FHG III 42] τὰ αὐτὰ τούτῳ φησίν. ὁμοίως Ἡρακλείδης ἐν τῷ Περὶ νόσων [fr. 74 Voss], ὅτι λαμπρᾶς ἦν οἰκίας ἵπποτροφηκός τοῦ πάππου. λέγει δὲ καὶ Ἐρατοσθένης ἐν τοῖς Ὀλυμπιονίκαις [FGrHist. 241 F 7 II 1014] τὴν πρώτην καὶ ἑβδομηκοστὴν ὀλυμπιάδα [496] νενικηκέναι τὸν τοῦ Μέτωνος πατέρα, μάρτυρι χρώμενος Ἀριστοτέλει [fr. 71]. (52) Ἀπολλόδωρος δ' ὁ γραμματικὸς ἐν τοῖς Χρονικοῖς [FGrHist. 244 F 32 II 1028] φησιν ὡς ἦν μὲν Μέτωνος υἱός . . . ὁ δὲ <τὴν> μίαν καὶ ἑβδομηκοστὴν ὀλυμπιάδα νενικηκώς κέλητι τούτου πάππος ἦν ὁμώνυμος . . .

2. But Satyrus in his *Lives* says that Empedocles was the son of Exaenetus and himself left behind a son named Exaenetus. And he says that in the same Olympiad Empedocles was victorious in the horse race and his son

in wrestling or, as Heraclides in his *Epitome* has it, in the foot-race (DL 8.53)⁷

Σάτυρος δὲ ἐν τοῖς Βίοις (fr. 11 FHG III 162] φησὶν, ὅτι Ἐμπεδοκλῆς υἱὸς μὲν ἦν Ἐξαίνετου, κατέλιπε δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς υἱὸν Ἐξαίνετον· ἐπὶ τε τῆς αὐτῆς ὀλυμπιάδος τὸν μὲν ἵππῳ κέλητι νενικημέναι, τὸν δὲ υἱὸν αὐτοῦ πάλῃ ἤ, ὡς Ἡρακλείδης ἐν τῇ Ἐπιτομῇ [fr. 6 FHG III 169), δρόμῳ.

Diogenes Laertius, as is his habit, gives the reader these different biographical accounts, without indicating which he finds more believable, probable, or accurate. In the first version, the philosopher descends from a distinguished grandfather named Empedocles, who kept race horses and in fact won a horse race at Olympia; the passage further states that the philosopher's father, Meton, also enjoyed a victory there, in an unspecified event. In the second version, the philosopher's father and son are both named Exaenetus, and the philosopher Empedocles and his son Exaenetus enjoy victories at Olympia, at the same meet but in different events (the philosopher wins in the horse race and the son in wrestling or in the foot race.) The only common theme in the different biographical accounts is that Empedocles and his family (grandfather, father, and son) have a strong connection with the Olympic Games. But is this connection a valid one, or simply one of association?

In the lists of Olympic winners mentioned previously,⁸ we do in fact find an Empedocles, the son of an Exaenetus, who wins the horse race in the Seventy-First Olympiad, an account that agrees with several of the versions in the first citation, and with the name of Empedocles' father as Exaenetus in the second citation. Furthermore, the victorious Empedocles of the Seventy-First Olympiad had a son named Exaenetus, who won in the Ninety-First and Ninety-Second Olympiads in wrestling, one of the two possibilities listed in the second citation.⁹ Therefore, it is not the philosopher himself, but his grandfather Empedocles who wins in the Seventy-First Olympiad, and Exaenetus, the grandfather's son (not the philosopher's), who wins in wrestling in the Ninety-First and Ninety-Second Olympiads. Empedocles himself has no Olympic victory in any event in any year. Why then do the biographers present him as an Olympic victor?

The biographers, it seems, have either fallen prey to a double confusion or misused their sources to biographical purpose.¹⁰ The victory of

Empedocles' grandfather was transferred to the philosopher, and the grandfather's son (Exaenetus) became the philosopher's son. This brought to the story a tradition of a father and son triumph there, in the sort of coincidence enjoyed by biographers. So while the family has a specific association with Olympia, Empedocles himself does not. And yet Diogenes Laertius insists upon and even emphasizes the association, as the following citations show:

3. I myself [Diogenes Laertius] found in Favorinus' *Memorabilia* that Empedocles feasted the sacred envoys at Olympia on a bull made of honey and barley-meal. (DL 8.53)

ἐγὼ δὲ εὗρον ἐν τοῖς ὑπομνήμασι Φαβωρίνου [fr. 3 FHG III 578], ὅτι καὶ βούν ἔθυσσε τοῖς θεωροῖς ὁ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς ἐκ μέλιτος καὶ ἀλφίτων.

4. It is said that Cleomenes the rhapsode recited these same verses [of Empedocles], *The Purifications* at Olympia; so too says Favorinus in his *Memorabilia*. (DL 8:63)

αὐτοὺς δὲ τούτους τοὺς Καθαροὺς [ἐν] Ὀλυμπίασι ῥαψωιδῆσαι λέγεται Κλεομένη τὸν ῥαψωιδόν, ὡς καὶ Φαβωρίνος ἐν Ἀπομνημονεύμασι.

5. At the time when Empedocles visited Olympia, he demanded excessive attention, so that no one was so mentioned in the meeting as was Empedocles. (DL 8.66)

καθ' ὃν δὲ χρόνον ἐπεδήμει Ὀλυμπίασιν, ἐπιστροφῆς ἤξιούτο πλείονος, ὥστε μηδενὸς ἐτέρου μνείαν γίνεσθαι ἐν ταῖς ὁμιλίαις τοσαύτην ὅσην Ἐμπεδοκλέους.

According to Diogenes Laertius and his sources, then, not only does Empedocles win at Olympia, he entertains sacred envoys there, has a recitation of his work the *Purifications* there, and demands excessive attention from all who attend. If these five citations have any thematic link beyond placing Empedocles at Olympia or speaking of his rather boorish behavior, it is not immediately apparent. But how credible are each of these citations?

Of the four big athletic events in Greece, the Pythian games at Delphi were second only to the Olympic ones and included musical and poetic contests in which a poet or philosophers could compete. And, even

though there were no similar official events at Olympia, any number of unofficial literary and poetic recitations and events took place there alongside the official athletic contests.¹¹ Therefore a recitation of Empedocles' work, with or without his presence, is quite possible. Moreover, the fame and power attributed to Empedocles' grandfather in the first citation might well account for the philosopher's role as host to "sacred" ambassadors or envoys. The term *sacred* could mean nothing more than "official," since all who attended the games did so under terms of a sacred truce between various powers; "sacred envoys" could simply be official representatives of a city or state. On the other hand, the term *sacred* could allude to the "sacred" quality of the *Purifications*, which was often interpreted as a religious work. And perhaps the victory mentioned in citations 1 and 2, or the recital in citation 4 went to Empedocles' head, making him act in an unpleasant, demanding, and conspicuous way. All these things could be true even if, taken all together, they begin to sound more and more improbable.

There is, in fact, a much simpler explanation for the tradition of Empedocles at Olympia, if we regard the citations as biographical flourishes rather than historical fact. The first two indicate, or force, a biographical association among well-known men of Sicily and a well-known event, the Olympic Games.¹² Because Empedocles is from Acragas and therefore a fellow citizen of the famous tyrant Theron, he shares Theron's association with Olympia and the games. The tyrants are known to us for their place in history, but they were best known to the ancient world as Olympian victors, a status widely published in Pindar's *Olympian Odes*. Six of the fourteen odes address Sicilian victories; the first three were written for Theron and his cousin and fellow Sicilian tyrant Hieron. Victory lists and biographical material were manipulated, then, to strengthen the association between Empedocles and Olympia, to strengthen the association between Sicily's famous sons, Theron, Hieron, and Empedocles. The importance of the association between Empedocles and Olympia is further emphasized by the three other citations that place him there without an athletic victory: as a poet (citation 4), as a host to sacred envoys (citation 3), and as a demanding and much-talked-about visitor (citation 5). The link between all these aspects of Empedocles' association with Olympia is seen in a single biographical anecdote and are, in fact, used to explain or elaborate upon it.

6. Empedocles of Acragas was victorious in the horse race at Olympia and being a Pythagorean and therefore avoiding animate sacrifice, shaping a

bull from myrrh and frankincense and costly perfumes, he divided it and distributed it to those at the festival. (Athenaeus 1.5.e = DK 31 A11)

ὁ Ἀκραγαντίνος ἵπποις Ὀλύμπια νικήσας Πυθαγορικὸς ὄν καὶ ἐμψύχων ἀπεχόμενος ἐκ σμύρνης καὶ λιβανωτοῦ καὶ τῶν πολυτελεστάτων ἀρωμάτων βοῦν ἀναπλάσας διένεμε τοῖς εἰς τὴν πανήγυριν ἀπαντήσασιν.

Here the disparate elements of Empedocles at Olympia are united: the horse race, the victory, the sacrifice, and the banquet.¹³ And citation 6, with its mention of Pythagoreanism, the shunning of animal sacrifice, and especially the details of a proper, inanimate sacrifice, allows us to link the whole tradition of Empedocles at Olympia to the *Purifications*, which is likely the starting point for the anecdote that places him there.

7. Then Ares was not god among them, nor yet was Din of Battle,
 Zeus was not king nor Kronos, nor yet Poseidon—
 but Kypris then was Queen.
 Her men earnestly appeased with good and pious offerings,
 with painted figures and sweet oil, their fragrance cunningly made,
 with unmixed myrrh and gifts of sweet smelling incense,
 and libations of honey flowing to the ground.
 Nor did the altar flow with the unspeakable slaughter of the bull,
 though this defilement still is greatest among men,
 to bereave the animal of his life to eat his limbs. (fr. 128)

οὐδέ τις ἦν κείνοισιν Ἄρης θεὸς οὐδὲ Κυδοιμὸς
 οὐδὲ Ζεὺς βασιλεὺς οὐδὲ Κρόνος οὐδὲ Ποσειδῶν,
 ἀλλὰ Κύπρις βασιλεία.
 τὴν οἱ γ' εὐσεβέεσσιν ἀγάλμασιν ἰλάσκοντο
 γραπτοῖς τε ζῳίοισι μύροισι τε δαιδαλεόδοις
 σμύρνης τ' ἀκρήτου θυσίαις λιβάνου τε θυώδους,
 ξανθῶν τε σπονδὰς μελίτων ῥίπτοντες ἐς οὐδὰς
 ταύρων δ' ἀκρήτοισι φόνους οὐ δεύετο βωμὸς,
 ἀλλὰ μύσος τοῦτ' ἔσκεν ἐν ἀνθρώποισι μέγιστον,
 θυμὸν ἀπορραΐσαντας ἐ<ν>έδμεναι ἠέα γυῖα.

Here Empedocles speaks of sacrifice as it occurred during the rule of Love, when humans had not yet fallen from grace by practicing blood-

shed. While bloodshed of any type is a transgression against Empedocles' moral code, it is the slaughter of animals, and especially bulls, that Empedocles emphasizes here. He then lists the appropriate inanimate offerings: statues or figurines, oil, myrrh, incense, and honey. The basis of this code may be a belief in the transmigration of the soul (which Athenaeus in his anecdote calls Pythagorean). Whatever its origin, the prohibition itself is strong and clear. The biographers, then, have made what is abstract and philosophic in the *Purifications* (Empedocles' prohibition against blood sacrifice) into a concrete sacrifice in the anecdote, one in which Empedocles offers a bull-shaped figure made of myrrh, frankincense, and costly perfumes. Empedocles' specific mention of a bull makes the anecdote all the more appropriate to Olympia, where the best and most common offering of the victorious athlete was a bull sacrificed to Zeus, followed by a communal meal or banquet. In terms of biographical logic, Empedocles has to make the sacrifice because he describes it in his work and has to make it somewhere. His familial and Sicilian association with Olympia, where bulls are the typical sacrifice, makes Olympia the perfect place.

This set of citations and anecdotes exemplify the biographical mind at work and shows how best we should approach it. All ancient biographers start with their subject's work, gleaning from it statements and experiences that seem autobiographical. For example, as discussed earlier, the biographers make the Cleis mentioned by Sappho her daughter and then, by the conventions of nomenclature, make it the name of Sappho's mother as well. Empedocles' use of the first-person "I" greatly enhanced this practice, giving the biographers freedom to interpret every statement on a personal and autobiographical level. Thus the proper sacrifice described in philosophical and metaphorical expression becomes an actual sacrifice in the biographers' interpretation; the abstract thought expressed in the philosophy is made concrete in the anecdote. (How "abstract" this abstract thought was in archaic philosophy may be debated, but for the purposes of this study, we may assume that biographical authors took the "phenomenological words" to be stating or expressing abstract thought.) The anecdote of the sacrifice can thus be characterized as both concrete and illustrative, since it serves to illustrate Empedocles' ethical or religious thoughts. Finally, the biographers give the anecdote greater veracity by setting it at Olympia, a site with a strong and ready association for the philosopher. They even supply a reason for the sacrifice (Empedocles' victory in the horse race). The anecdote then finds agreement and support for its details

in the general tradition that surrounds Empedocles and Acragas, horse races and Olympian winners, tyrants and philosophers.

Empedocles' anecdote of sacrifice is one of the most perfect examples of philosophical biography, the biographers' methods, and the method used in this study. Different material and types of material, however, call for different approaches. The number and concrete quality of the details in citation 6, for example, encourage us to turn directly to Empedocles' text, while the lack of details in citations 3, 4, and 5 requires that we consider biographical motive and use of the material. Citation 3, for example, speaks not only of the association between Empedocles and Olympia, but also rather casually illustrates Empedocles' religious beliefs; only knowledge of the preferred Olympic sacrifice for victory (a bull) allows the citation full significance. Citations 4 and 5 also demonstrate the association with Olympia but are used otherwise, to introduce the greater topos of the philosopher at the games. While this particular topos does not occur for all the philosophers, it does occur often enough (in the lives of Plato and Pythagoras, for example),¹⁴ to be classified as free floating or transferred. It drifts from subject to subject, generally indicating a doxographical tradition, a sort of genealogy¹⁵ of philosophers and schools as teachers and students, which will be discussed later. Here, citation 5 is specifically used to introduce Empedocles' personal character, to which we now turn our attention.

Empedocles: Divine Character and Manner

In citation 5, we learn that when Empedocles visited Olympia, he demanded "excessive attention," so much so that he drew the attention, and the talk, of all present. Using the biographers' methods, we can adduce behavior that was selfish, egotistical, and arrogant, which in fact agrees with their depiction of Empedocles generally. Just before citation 5, in fact, Diogenes Laertius calls Empedocles boastful and selfish; others describe him as a braggart given to theoretical arrogance and eccentric dress.

8. And he would put on purple robes and over them a golden belt, as Favorinus says in his *Memorabilia*, and bronze sandals and a Delphic [laurel] wreath. He had thick hair and was accompanied by a train of boy attendants. And he was ever grave in his manner and appearance. Thus he would go forth and the people, meeting him, saw in him something worthy of a king. (DL 8.73)

διὸ δὴ πορφύραν τε ἀναλαβεῖν αὐτὸν καὶ στρόφιον ἐπιθέσθαι χρυσοῦν, ὡς Φαβωρίνος ἐν Ἀπομνημονεύμασιν, ἔτι τ' ἐμβάδας χαλκᾶς καὶ στέμμα Δελφικόν. κόμη τε ἦν αὐτῷ βαθεῖα καὶ παῖδες ἀκόλουθοι καὶ αὐτὸς αἰεὶ σκυθρωπὸς ἐφ' ἐνὸς σχήματος ἦν. τοιοῦτος δὴ προήκει, τῶν πολιτῶν ἐντυχόντων καὶ τοῦτο ἀξιωσάντων οἰονεὶ βασιλείας τινὸς παράσημον.

9. For Empedocles, fastening a fillet of deep purple around his hair, walked proudly around the streets of the Greeks, composing hymns to prove that he had become a god. (Philostratus VA 8.7 = DK 31A18)

Ε. μὲν γὰρ καὶ στρόφιον τῶν ἀλουργοτάτων περὶ αὐτὴν [σψ. τὴν κόμην] ἀρμόσας ἐσόβει περὶ τὰς τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀγυιάς ὕμνους ξυντιθείς, ὡς θεὸς ἐξ ἀνθρώπου ἔσοιτο.

These depictions, like the sacrifice at Olympia, doubtless owe their existence to a philosophical statement couched in the first person, which was to provide the biographers a rich vein of material that is generally used to comic, if not satirical, effect.

10. Friends, who dwell in the great town above tawny Acragas,
upon the city's citadel, busy in your good works,
You who are reverent harbors for strangers and strangers to evil,
Greetings. I go among you an immortal god, no longer mortal,
but honored among all men, appropriately,
wreathed in ribbons and fresh garlands.
I am honored by men and women. They follow me
by the thousands, seeking the advantageous way,
some desiring prophecy, others, against all sorts of diseases,
ask to learn a well-pointed saying,
having suffered too long in their painful distress. (fr. 112)

ὦ φίλοι, οἳ μέγα ἄστῳ κατὰ ξανθοῦ Ἀκράγαντος
ναίετ' ἀν' ἄκρα πόλεος, ἀγαθῶν μελεδήμονες ἔργων,
ξείνων αἰδοῖοι λιμένες, κακότητος ἄπειροι,
χαίρετ' ἐγὼ δ' ὑμῖν θεὸς ἄμβροτος, οὐκέτι θνητός
πωλεῦμαι μετὰ πᾶσι τετιμένος, ὥσπερ ἔοικα,
ταινίαις τε περίστεπτος στέφεσίν τε θαλείοις.
τοῖσιν † ἄμ' † ἀν' ἴκωμαι ἄστεα τηλεθάοντα,
ἀνδράσιν ἠδὲ γυναιξί, σεβίζομαι· οἳ δ' ἄμ' ἔπονται

μυρίοι ἐξερέοντες, ὅπῃ πρὸς κέρδος ἀταρός,
οἱ μὲν μαντοσυνέων κεχρημένοι, οἱ δ' ἐπὶ νούσων
παντοίων ἐπύθοντο κλυεῖν εὐηγέα βάξιν,
δηρὸν δὴ χαλεπήμοι πεπαρμένοι <ἀμφ' ὀδύνησιν>.

Here, Empedocles uses his customary first-person address to describe the soul's triumphant final state in its journey toward spiritual and physical perfection; the chains of mortality are broken and the speaker, reborn, goes forth garlanded and acclaimed, aiding others in their journey.¹⁶ In discussing the fragment, I have been careful to designate the first-person "I" as the speaker, as befits the allegorical nature of the verse. The biographers, however, immediately identified the "I" as Empedocles himself.¹⁷ We see their reading of the fragment in citations 5 and especially in 8 and 9, where Empedocles is depicted as a pompous and self-proclaimed god dressed in liturgical garb, proclaiming prophecies and cures. The ribbons and garlands of the original work become the purple robes, golden belt, and the laurel wreath of the citations, his thousands of attendants whittled down to trains of boy attendants, and there is more than a hint of effeminacy and self-indulgence in the description.¹⁸ The claim to divinity is belittled as mere boastfulness;¹⁹ remarks on his always formal, grave behavior (repeated several times in his biography) suggest an exaggerated view of his own importance.²⁰ A further indication of this boastful, selfish behavior, as Diogenes Laertius characterizes it, occurs in his demand for excessive attention, undue reverence, we might say, when he visits Olympia.

Empedocles' biographical character results from what seems to the biographers a vainglorious boast, the declaration that Empedocles has become a god ("I go among you an immortal god, no longer mortal.") His association with Olympia, discussed in the previous citations, supports this elevated status (as Pindar so often remarks, Olympic victors outrank the common run of mortal men; in the citations, Empedocles seems to present himself as far above mere mortal status) and also provides a concrete grounding for his actions there. Hints about his character and his demand for attention are now also evident in the earlier citations; selfishness, boastfulness, and theatricality will be the routine charges laid at Empedocles' door. His perceived character, then, is little more than a parody of his work. His god-like nature, attitude, and appearance, concretized and elaborated in the anecdotal examples of his actions, character, and dress, are the result of a philosophical statement interpreted biographi-

cally. The use of various *topoi*, which also play their part in these characterizations, are discussed in the remaining sections in this chapter.

Empedocles' Teachers

Part of the blame for Empedocles' eccentricity can be attributed to the teachers Diogenes Laertius assigns him, although, if our only source for ancient philosophy were the biographers, we would have to conclude that there was little or no independent thought in the ancient world. Rather, as the doxographies show, there was a neat, observable, and carefully delineated progression of schools, philosophers, and teachers, in which one philosopher or school of thought carefully and ponderously followed another. The teachers are especially important, because mistakes and new theories alike can be laid at their door, depending on the biographer's view of his subject or of the subject's teacher within the doxographical tradition. Given a hostile biographer and a hostile tradition of biography, the subject steals his ideas from his teacher and may even betray him. In a favorable tradition, the student rebels and finds a new teacher or founds a new school of thought. Only the most hostile tradition admits neither student nor teacher.

Empedocles shows a generally favorable tradition, in that he has several teachers. According to the biographers, Empedocles' theatrical manner and appearance is to be attributed to both Anaximander and Pythagoras, while his research methods imitate those of Anaxagoras (Alcidamas *ap.* DL 8.56).²¹ Diogenes Laertius further notes that Empedocles imitated Parmenides' verse (Theophrastus *ap.* DL 8.56), and another source tells us that Empedocles either turned from Parmenides to Anaxagoras and Pythagoras, or that he imitated Xenophanes, with whom he is said to have lived.²²

Some of these reports can be eliminated on purely chronological grounds: Anaximander as a teacher can quickly be ruled out, since he probably died a good fifty years before Empedocles was born.²³ The report that Empedocles studied with Anaxagoras is doubtful also, even given the notorious problem of Anaxagoras' dates. Assuming, as most do, that Anaxagoras' dates are ca. 500–428 BCE and Empedocles' are ca. 495–35 BCE, a relationship of contemporaries rather than student and teacher seems more probable, if a relationship between the two indeed existed.

Because there is no historical logic to the pairing of Empedocles, Anaximander, and Anaxagoras as student and teacher, we must seek a biographical one. The relationship that existed between these philosophers, if it did

exist, was of necessity a matter of intellectual, rather than personal, influence. An intellectual relationship, however, was too abstract for the biographers, who were eager to find (or to invent) personal references and relationships in the philosophy. Their insistence on the personal results in concrete anecdotes about philosopher X as the student/teacher of philosopher Y; the resulting student/teacher tradition constitutes one of the most common biographical *topoi*.²⁴

Intellectual similarities between philosophers can be enough to link them as student and teacher. The fact that Anaxagoras and Empedocles both independently sought to rework Milesian philosophy in response to Parmenidean philosophy may lie behind the personal relationship attributed to them.²⁵ Aristotle, in fact, represents Anaximander as Empedocles' teacher by their theories of condensation and rarefaction, common theories which each held, but had each independently reached.²⁶

The same student/teacher *topos* informs reports of Parmenides and Xenophanes as teachers who further influenced Empedocles' literary style. This much is true: all three wrote in verse, Parmenides and Empedocles use the same metrical form, and Xenophanes influenced Parmenides' philosophical views (which is why Xenophanes and Parmenides are universally described in their own biographies as teacher and student.) However, it is unlikely, if not chronologically impossible, for Empedocles himself to have studied with either Parmenides or Xenophanes (Parmenides was born ca. 515 BCE, while Xenophanes' dates are 570–475 BCE). However, if we substituted the word *influence* for *teacher*, the mists begin to clear. Xenophanes certainly influenced Parmenides' philosophical views. Empedocles, in his response to Parmenides' views, was therefore indirectly influenced by Xenophanes as well.²⁷ So not only does the biography make an abstract, philosophical, intellectual, or literary influence concrete, it also neatly orders or suggests a more linear doxographical tradition, the generation of teachers, students, and philosophies. Parmenides and Xenophanes, like Anaxagoras and Anaximander, are called Empedocles' teachers because of their philosophical influence or because of similar or shared philosophical theory and interests. The biographical tendency to equate philosophical or even literary influence with an actual student/teacher relationship translates, in the biographies, into a personal, concrete student-teacher relationship, which can be traced through the philosophic generations.

Several sources make Empedocles the student of Pythagoras, or of his son Telauges, or of other named or unknown Pythagoreans.²⁸ As we saw in citation 6, Athenaeus ascribes the choice of inanimate offerings at

Olympia to Empedocles' Pythagorean beliefs, and Diogenes Laertius cites Empedocles' work to support Pythagoras as Empedocles' teacher, writing that, "Empedocles himself mentions Pythagoras, saying,"

II. There was a man among them of rare wisdom,
possessed of the greatest wealth of knowledge.
(DL 8.54; cf. Empedocles' fr. 129)²⁹

ἦν δέ τις ἐν κείνοισιν ἀνὴρ περιώσια εἰδώς,
ὅς δὴ μῆριστον πραπίδων ἐκτίσατο πλοῦτον.

Empedocles himself, however, even in the larger fragment 129 from which Diogenes Laertius here quotes, never names this man of rare wisdom, nor, I would argue, had he a real individual in mind. Rather, I believe, the fragment speaks of the pure and ideal soul of potential existence in its unique state of complete wisdom. The biographers, in contrast, clearly desired a more concrete and possibly autobiographical reference for the fragment, and their first choice was Pythagoras.³⁰ As described in their biographies, there are striking similarities of dress and behavior between Empedocles and Pythagoras. Both wear long hair and purple robes, both compete at Olympia,³¹ both attract great attentions there, both are dignified in manner,³² both are solemn in demeanor, and, most important of all, both claim to have become gods.³³

The association between Empedocles and Pythagoras, evident in these conflated characteristics of eccentric dress, solemn behavior, and the claim to have become a god, is the result of their shared philosophical belief in metempsychosis, the transmigration or rebirth of the soul into various states of purification through various types of life and death experiences, a belief which was almost universally attributed to Pythagoras. Although the theory of metempsychosis was fairly common in and around Empedocles' time and location,³⁴ ancient authors, like some modern ones, almost unanimously attribute the theory to Pythagoras and imply, if they do not explicitly assert, that Empedocles simply elaborated or altered a uniquely Pythagorean doctrine.³⁵ Pythagoras' work does not now exist, save in brief quotation;³⁶ we cannot, therefore, directly trace descriptions of his dress and manner or those anecdotes in which he returns from the dead or claims to be a god to his own statements on metempsychosis.

However, we do have Diogenes Laertius, who groups Empedocles and Pythagoras thematically, ends his life of Pythagoras by announcing that he

will now move on to noteworthy Pythagoreans, and immediately begins his life of Empedocles, whom he seems to consider a student of Pythagoras. Given this biographical link forged between the two philosophers, this shared biographical tradition of student-teacher, having marked physical and personal similarities, is not surprising. The original link between the two was their shared belief in metempsychosis that the biographers made concrete by similar dress and manner. Through the theory of metempsychosis, Empedocles and Pythagoras are further linked by accusations of fraudulent claims to divinity (divinity is, of course, the logical philosophical outcome of metempsychosis, rebirth into a higher form) and by deaths which punish the philosophers for their implied claims to divinity. Pythagoras is accused of hiding in the earth under a rock and telling his disciples of his trip to the underworld and back, and his death occurs when he refuses to cross a bean field (DL 8.38, 41; 8.39, 40 and 45). Beans, of course, symbolize rebirth, and one of the Pythagorean maxims that Diogenes Laertius quotes advises his followers to strictly avoid them (DL 8.19, 33, 34).

Linked through personal and philosophical similarities, Pythagoras' biography becomes a template for the life of Empedocles.³⁷ Differences in biographical detail, however, are easily traced to Empedocles' philosophical work. Citation 7, for example, speaks of the soul's fall from its high state by the sin of bloodshed in sacrifice, which inspires the biographers' anecdote of the honey and barley bull offered at Olympia. Empedocles describes the triumph of metempsychosis and the soul's elevated state in citation 10, which in turn forms the basis for both his claims to divinity and the extravagant characterization in citations 8 and 9. The shared belief in metempsychosis is explained by the biographers in terms of a student-teacher relationship; in his work, Empedocles expands upon the doctrine taught to him by Pythagoras. That imitation is extended further by the many similarities in their anecdotal traditions: both compete at the games, attract attention, and claim to be gods. The theory of metempsychosis that Empedocles presents in his work, then, enables the biographers to characterize him merely as a student or imitator of Pythagoras.³⁸ The evidence of citation 10 enables them to fill in the picture with the philosopher's own words.

THE CAREERS OF EMPEDOCLES

Empedocles' careers, like his character, are the result of a biographical reading of his work. The same biographical process which resulted in the

different aspects of his personal character also results in his different careers. Philosophers, in the biographies, are rarely just philosophers; most achieve notoriety in other fields as well. Many are statesmen, some are physicians, several produce literary works, and some make predictions. Empedocles achieves renown in all these fields.³⁹ In the lives of those philosophers also known as statesmen or poets, the biographers drew on philosophical works that discuss politics or literature. Many of Solon's biographical achievements, for example, are elaborations of his political verse, while Plato's criticism of poetry and poets created a tradition that he wrote poetry before turning to philosophy. In Empedocles' case, the biographers' task was greatly simplified; they had only to turn to his work and an autobiographical reading of the following fragment.

12. Finally, then, prophets and poets and physicians
and princes among mortal men are they wont to be,
blossoming forth from this state to become gods, greatest in honor.
(fr. 146)

εἰς δὲ τέλος μάντις τε καὶ ὕμνοπόλοι καὶ ἰητροί
καὶ πρόμοι ἀνθρώποισιν ἐπιχθονίοισι πέλονται,
ἔνθεν ἀναβλαστοῦσι θεοὶ τιμῆσι φέριστοι.

In this single citation, the biographers had Empedocles' own assessment of the careers that are "best for men;" we cannot really be surprised, then, to find anecdotes that speak of Empedocles' engagement in politics, poetry, medicine, and prophecy.⁴⁰

The motive of philosophical biography, like poetic biography, is to flesh out the bare philosophical or poetic outlines that exist in the subject's work with concrete physical detail. The motive behind each particular anecdote, however, varies from subject to subject, and an anecdote's favorable or hostile intent depends upon the biographer's interpretation of the subject's work. For example, works that seem to express impiety or arrogance result in hostile anecdotes, while works that express or at least seem to express piety and humility result in approval and favorable anecdotes. The biographies of two poets show these two traditions clearly: Aeschylus, whose work seemed to praise and to sanction the traditions of religion, society, and the state, enjoys a biographical tradition full of approval and is almost completely favorable. Euripides, on the other hand, whose work seemed dangerously radical when it came to traditional religion, society,

and the role of the state, has a biographical tradition that is extremely punitive and hostile (which is why he ends up exiled and murdered.)⁴¹ Aeschylus and Euripides are extreme examples, however, and usually the two biographical traditions, hostile and favorable, are usually mixed in any given life. Reactions to and depictions of Empedocles' careers vary, just as his character was described as either vain and theatrical or dignified and lordly, according to either a hostile or a favorable reaction to his work.⁴² An almost completely favorable tradition informs his political career, the first to be examined.

Empedocles the Politician

Diogenes Laertius, in his discussion of Empedocles' background, tells us that Empedocles was a member of a wealthy and politically prominent family of Acragas. In other words, Empedocles has the standard biographical background for a philosopher.⁴³ However Empedocles, like other philosophers, was able to overcome the twin handicaps of wealth and birth. His rejection of them constitute another topos of philosophical biography, as it does for several others, for Empedocles, like Solon and Heraclitus, refuses the city's highest office when it is offered to him.⁴⁴

Although refusals such as these fall into a general category, their function differs from biography to biography or subject to subject. The same act can inspire praise for one philosopher and condemnation for another. For example, Solon's refusal of the Athenian tyranny glorifies the philosopher and is part of the favorable, democratic tradition of his biography. His refusal, like the constitution he creates, helps the people and promotes their democracy.⁴⁵ Heraclitus, on the other hand, who refuses an inherited kingship, is characterized by that refusal as a surly misanthrope who hates the people; his refusal even to govern indicates his scorn and hatred for his fellow citizens and is part of the hostile tradition that vilifies him.

To determine how the topos functions in the biography of Empedocles, we turn first to his political life as given by Diogenes Laertius.

13. Aristotle too declares him to have been a champion of freedom and averse to rule of every kind seeing that, as Xanthus relates in his account of him, he declined the kingship when it was offered to him, obviously because he preferred the frugal life. With this Timaeus agrees . . . (DL 8.63)

φησὶ δ' αὐτὸν καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης [fr. 66]
 ἐλεύθερον γεγονέναι καὶ πάσης ἀρχῆς ἀλλότριον, εἴ γε τὴν βασιλείαν
 αὐτῷ διδομένην παρητήσατο, καθάπερ Ξάνθος ἐν τοῖς περὶ αὐτοῦ
 λέγει, τὴν λιτότητα δηλὸν ὅτι πλεον ἀγαπήσας. τὰ δ' αὐτὰ καὶ Τίμαιος
 [fr. 88a FHG I 214] εἴρηκε . . .

According to the biographers, Empedocles' reason for refusing the kingship is a preference of the simple life, a preference shared by Heraclitus, as we shall see. Other than the fact that both philosophers refuse a kingship, the two have nothing in common, and even their shared refusal functions differently in their biographies. Heraclitus' refusal is proof of his misanthropy, but Empedocles, like Solon, is presented as a democratic champion whose various political acts, such as refusing the kingship, benefit the people. In the biography, Diogenes Laertius uses this refusal to introduce various other examples of Empedocles' political actions: he defeats several tyrants, destroys an oligarchy, and staunchly and publicly defends freedom. And so the political tradition that exists for Empedocles is almost entirely favorable; the anecdotes that make up and support this favorable tradition, however, are entirely unbelievable. This is where we see the real weakness of the biographers' methods. Despite their best efforts, they find few fragments to support their reading of citation 12, for neither the *Purifications* nor *On Nature* readily lend themselves to political interpretation.

Given this scarcity of material, the biographers were forced to rely on schematized patterns and established topoi to provide a political career for Empedocles. The following anecdote illustrates the type of material the biographers used to provide evidence for his political career; in Diogenes Laertius' text, it follows the refusal of kingship.

14. With this [the refusal of kingship], Timaeus agrees, at the same time giving the reason why Empedocles favored democracy, namely that, having been invited to dinner with one of the officials, when the dinner had gone on some time and no wine was put on the table, although the other guests kept quiet, Empedocles, becoming indignant, ordered wine to be brought. Then the host confessed that he was waiting for the servant of the senate to appear. When he came, he was made master of the banquet, clearly by the arrangement of the host, whose design of making himself tyrant was only thinly veiled, for he ordered the guests either to drink the wine or have it poured on their heads. For the time being, Empedocles was reduced to silence; the next day he impeached both of them, the host and

master of the banquet, and secured their condemnation and execution. This, then was the beginning of his political career. (DL 8.64)

τὰ δ' αὐτὰ καὶ Τιμαῖος [fr. 88a FHG I 214] εἶρηκε, τὴν αἰτίαν ἅμα παρατιθέμενος τοῦ δημοτικὸν εἶναι τὸν ἄνδρα. φησὶ γὰρ ὅτι κληθεὶς ὑπὸ τινος τῶν ἀρχόντων, ὡς προβαίνοντος τοῦ δείπνου τὸ ποτὸν οὐκ εἰσεφέρετο, τῶν [δ'] ἄλλων ἠσυχάζοντων, μισοπονήρως διατεθεὶς ἐκέλευσεν εἰσφέρειν· ὁ δὲ κεκληκὼς ἀναμένειν ἔφη τὸν τῆς βουλῆς ὑπηρέτην. ὡς δὲ παρεγένετο, ἐγενήθη συμποσίαρχος, τοῦ κεκληκὸτος δηλονότι καταστήσαντος, ὃς ὑπεγράφετο τυραννίδος ἀρχὴν· ἐκέλευσε γὰρ ἢ πίνειν ἢ καταχεῖσθαι τῆς κεφαλῆς. τότε μὲν οὖν ὁ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς ἠσύχασε· τῇ δ' ὑστεραίαι εἰσαγαγὼν εἰς δικαστήριον ἀπέκτεινε καταδικάσας ἀμφοτέρους, τὸν τε κλήτορα καὶ τὸν συμποσίαρχον. ἀρχὴ μὲν οὖν αὐτῷ τῆς πολιτείας ἦδε.

And a strange beginning it is. The anecdote comes to us from Timaeus, a historian and compiler generally hostile to philosophers (as this anecdote might suggest) and therefore generally unreliable. That such a man is one of the very few named sources for Empedocles' political career does little to strengthen the credibility of the tradition.⁴⁶ The anecdote is especially inauspicious for one whose moral code prohibits bloodshed, especially when it stems from Empedocles having to wait for wine or being threatened with having it poured on his head. The anecdote seems to be nothing more than a comic invention, although several interpretations of it have been offered by various scholars. Most, while quick to point out that the story is obviously untrue, see in it nonetheless a valid indication of Empedocles' role in Acragas' transformation from tyranny to democracy, although no other evidence for such a role can be found.⁴⁷ Others more properly suggest that the story originated in comedy, a not unusual source for the biographies of philosophers as well as poets,⁴⁸ and the anecdote certainly presents Empedocles in a potentially comic light. Biographically speaking, banquets are frequently used to display character,⁴⁹ and Empedocles' behavior and response to his tyrannical host also suggest the very common topos of philosopher and tyrant.⁵⁰ A similar example of the topos is preserved for us elsewhere by Diogenes Laertius, where he tells of a banquet given by Dionysus, tyrant of Syracuse, that Plato and Aristippus attend. According to Diogenes Laertius, when the wine was brought, Dionysus ordered everyone to put on purple robes and dance; Plato refuses and Aristippus agrees. On one hand, the anecdote contrasts the wild (uncivilized), imperious behav-

ior of Dionysus with Plato's calm dignity and on the other, illustrates Plato's indifference to power and wealth, by his opposition to Aristippus who literally dances to the tyrant's tune. Thus the anecdote works on several different levels: it demonstrates the difference between philosopher and tyrant and between two different philosophers and their characters and schools. The anecdote of Empedocles at the banquet is also used several different ways, although it indicates a greater amount of ambivalence toward its subject. Empedocles' quite reasonable request favorably contrasts to the unreasonable demands of the would-be tyrant. Yet, while the setting and the threat to have wine poured on his head are laughable, his actions in securing the men's execution are not. For even if his intent is noble (Empedocles seeks to end the tyranny before it begins), his actions are ridiculous and again speak of his exaggerated sense of self-worth; worse, they are out of keeping with his philosophical beliefs as stated in the *Purifications* and discussed earlier in this chapter: how can a man who prohibits bloodshed execute two men for withholding wine or threatening to pour it on his head?

In philosophical biography, the setting of the banquet is a standard means of illustrating character, and the details here are vague enough to place the anecdote during any time of civic unrest, a condition common to most of Greece most of the time. Finally, the anecdote's source is telling; although Diogenes Laertius presents the anecdote favorably, there is no evidence that his source Timaeus did. Timaeus' hostility toward philosophers does not strengthen the anecdote's credibility and intent and in fact by suggesting that it began in this manner, seriously weakens the notion that Empedocles had a political career at all.

Diogenes Laertius' other attempts to flesh out Empedocles' political career are not much more convincing: he mentions the destruction of an oligarchy, a political exile, a speech that defeats a tyranny, and a speech about freedom. Our information about the first of these, the destruction of an oligarchy, is especially vague. Diogenes Laertius tells us only that Empedocles destroyed an organization called the "Thousand" some years after its birth and that, by its destruction, Empedocles proved he favored the popular cause.⁵¹ Our ancient sources, including Diodorus Siculus, makes no mention of the Thousand or any similar organization, and our modern sources tend to depend on Diogenes Laertius for their information. In short, nothing is known about the organization, its beginning, or demise.⁵² The anecdote is probably nothing more than a vague reference to political change in Acragas after Theron and Thrasydaeus, tied to

Empedocles by a lost comic portrayal or an attempt to link a famous son to important events at home. Like the traditional refusal to rule, this does little more than demonstrate a standard biographical topos of the philosopher's democratic sympathies, which the next anecdote also (and also rather oddly) portrays.⁵³

15. Again, when Acron the physician asked the council for a site on which to build a monument to his father, who had been eminent among physicians, Empedocles came forward and forbade it in a speech in which he enlarged upon equality, and in particular put the following question: "But what inscription should we put upon it: Should it be, 'Acron the eminent physician of Acragas, son of Acros/ is buried beneath the steep eminence of his most eminent native city?'" Some give the second line as, "Is laid in an exalted tomb on a most exalted peak." Some attribute the verse to Simonides. (DL 8.65)

πάλιν δὲ Ἄκρωνος τοῦ ἰατροῦ τόπον αἰτοῦντος παρὰ τῆς βουλῆς εἰς κατασκευὴν πατρῷου μνήματος διὰ τὴν ἐν τοῖς ἰατροῖς ἀκρότητα παρελθὼν ὁ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς ἐκώλυσε, τὰ τε ἄλλα περὶ ἰσότητος διαλεχθεὶς καὶ τι καὶ τοιοῦτον ἐρωτήσας· τί δὲ ἐπιγράψομεν ἐλεγείον; ἢ τοῦτο· ἄκρον . . . ἀκροτάτης" [B 157]; τινὲς δὲ τὸν δεῦτερον στίχον οὕτω προφέρονται· ἄκροτάτης κορυφῆς τύμβος ἄκρος κατέχει· τοῦτό τινες Σιμωνίδου φασὶν εἶναι.

Diogenes Laertius himself admits that the epigram may have been wrongfully attributed to Empedocles.⁵⁴ The details of the anecdote, as well as Diogenes Laertius' placement of it, make it seem a reference to political activities. This is the speech Empedocles makes "about freedom;"⁵⁵ it comes just after the anecdote of the banquet and before that of the Thousand. A politically necessary oratorical ability may also be suggested, and the anecdote may serve a dual purpose by demonstrating Empedocles' rhetorical as well as political prowess.⁵⁶ However, since Empedocles and Acron are linked in the *Suda* as having studied sophistry together in Athens, their implied competition here, as well as a certain sophistry evident in the epigram, may suggest an oratorical battle, with or without political overtones and intentions. The speech "on freedom," like the epigram that floats from subject to subject (here, Empedocles and Simonides), suggests that the biographers, with no solid evidence from other work to illustrate the political career that Empedocles praises in citation 12, were forced to depend upon a topos. However, when the biographers

came to their last proof of Empedocles' political career, the tradition of Empedocles' exile, they were on firmer ground.

In the previous discussion, we have seen that Empedocles' political career follows a standard scheme: a love of democracy and a hatred of tyranny as demonstrated by several *topoi*: refusal of kingship, opposition to tyrants and tyranny, and the destruction of an oligarchy. The next anecdote, which discusses Empedocles' exile, also remains within the limits of standard or schematized philosophical biography. Diogenes Laertius concludes his discussion of Empedocles' political career by remarking that,

16. Later, when he [Empedocles] was away from Acragas, the descendants of his enemies opposed his return and because of this, he went off to the Peloponessus and died. (DL 8.67)⁵⁷

ὕστερον μέντοι τοῦ Ἀκράγαντος οἰκίζομένου ἀντέστησαν αὐτοῦ τῆι καθόδῳ οἱ τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἀπόγονοι· διόπερ εἰς Πελοπόννησον ἀποχωρήσας ἐτελεύτησεν.

Citation 16, which ends Diogenes Laertius' discussion of Empedocles' political career and begins discussion of Empedocles' deaths (one of which occurs in exile), allows no other interpretation than political exile brought about by political enmity. In any case, the biographical tradition demands it: many, if not most, philosophers undergo exile at some point during their lives.⁵⁸ Political exile is, of course, appropriate for a democratic reformer, and Empedocles' exile is plausible within the scheme of his biography.⁵⁹ Other sorts of exile, however, are plausible for other philosophers and for any variety of reasons. Thus the philosopher's exile became a standard *topos* serving either the favorable or hostile tradition. For example, Solon's exile was voluntary and noble, symbolizing and enhancing his political actions; Heraclitus was driven, by his misanthropic nature, to voluntary but quite ignominious exile; Democritus' exile illustrates and strengthens the tradition of his madness.⁶⁰ Empedocles' exile is voluntary, political, and favorable, as is appropriate to the generally favorable tradition of his political career. Diogenes Laertius presents the exile neutrally and rather casually.⁶¹ Since, according to biographical reasoning, Empedocles spoke of it himself in his own work, Diogenes Laertius may have felt no other comment was necessary.

17. I wept and wailed, looking upon the unfamiliar land . . . (fr. 118)

κλαύσά τε καὶ κώκυσα ἰδὼν ἀσυνήθεα χῶρον . . .

18. From such honor and so great a happiness . . . (fr. 119)

ἔξ οὔης τιμῆς τε καὶ ὄσσου μήκεος ὄλβου . . .

Although Empedocles speaks metaphorically in citations 17 and 18 about the soul's exile from the gods during the rule of Strife,⁶² a literal and very personal interpretation—Empedocles' reaction to his own exile—was easily adduced by the biographers. The only other evidence we have for an exile, political or otherwise, comes from Timaeus, whom we have no reason to trust, and from Pliny, who characterizes Empedocles' travels as “more like an exile.”⁶³ This final part of the political tradition, like the other anecdotes examined, has very little historical credence; moreover, it can be directly traced to extant philosophical material, which suggests that biographical invention was at work throughout.

Had Empedocles a political career at all? The evidence produced by Diogenes Laertius, as we have seen, is extremely weak. The career itself follows a schematized pattern and most of the anecdotes have been revealed as biographical topoi. The weakness of the tradition seems to bother even some of the biographers. It must have been difficult to reconcile the democratic reformer of the anecdotes with the philosopher who, by way of greeting, announced his immortality. It is Timaeus, as Diogenes Laertius records, who noted the contradiction.

19. At any rate, Timaeus in his eleventh and twelfth book, for he mentions him often, says that Empedocles seems to have an opposite view in his politics, whereas in his verses he appears boastful and selfish, for he says, “Greetings. I go among you an immortal god, no longer mortal,” and so on. (DL 8.66)⁶⁴

ὁ γέ τοι Τίμαιος ἐν τῇ ια καὶ ιβ (πολλάκις γὰρ αὐτοῦ μνημονεύει) φησὶν ἐναντίαν ἐσχημέναι γνώμην αὐτὸν <ἐν> τε τῇ πολιτείαι <καὶ ἐν τῇ ποιήσει> ὅπου μὲν γὰρ μέτριον καὶ ἐπεικῆ φαινέσθαι, ὅπου δὲ ἀλαζόνα καὶ φίλαυτον [ἐν τῇ ποιήσει] φησὶ γοῦν ᾿χαίρετ' . . . πωλεῦμαι καὶ τὰ ἔξις.

The contrast between the democratic activist of the favorable political tradition and the braggart of Empedocles' biographical character is bluntly juxtaposed here, the incongruity of the two portraits illustrated with a quotation from Empedocles' work. Timaeus' aim was not historical veracity (rather, his words suggest another of his attempts to disparage Empedocles

by drawing attention to this discrepancy), and yet his point is well taken. Empedocles' characterization as arrogant and attention-seeking, as discussed earlier, simply does not correspond to his career characterization of democrat and tyrant-slayer. Naturally not: in the political career we have disparate topoi and a few biographically interpreted fragments welded together into a schematized, favorable political biographical career, not a historical survey of an actual one.

Empedocles' personal character, while created by the same method, draws upon different fragments than those used to create the political career. In terms of character, the biographers' interpretation of the fragments was hostile and derivative; the result is the boastful, selfish, and rather foppish Pythagorean poseur. The two traditions (democrat and would-be god) make for an uneasy biographical alliance, a democratic champion with delusions of divinity. The political anecdotes examined previously, intended to characterize Empedocles as a reformer and champion of the people, are ultimately not convincing. Given the nature of Empedocles' work and language—and the scarcity of work that allows a political reading—the biographers were forced to depend instead upon comic allusions and standard topoi, resulting in anecdotes that, upon investigation, weaken the political career they were meant to prove or discuss. The weakness of the anecdotes illustrates the biographer's lack of appropriate material to flesh out Empedocles' political career as among those listed in citation 12. As we have seen, the biographers themselves had reservations about the dual nature of Empedocles' character, questioning the inherent contradiction of their own creation. With the tradition of Empedocles' political career now laid to rest, we move to the second of those careers which Empedocles praised as "most worthy for men."

Empedocles the Poet

Empedocles' poetic talent is beyond dispute.⁶⁵ Ancient and modern commentators, excepting one, have praised the poetic form in which Empedocles presented his philosophic theories. Bury calls him a born poet; Guthrie praises the ease and naturalness with which Empedocles transforms theory into verse; Lucretius calls his poetry immortal; and Plutarch's remarks are worth full quotation: "It is not his habit to decorate his subject matter, for the sake of fine writing, with epithets like bright colors, but rather to make each one the expression of a particular essence or potency."⁶⁶ The

exception to this nearly unanimous praise is Aristotle, despite the favorable way in which Diogenes Laertius presents his comments.

20. In his work *On Poets*, he [Aristotle] says that Empedocles was of Homer's school and powerful in diction, being great in metaphors and in the use of all other poetic devices. (DL 8.58)⁶⁷

Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ . . . ἐν δὲ τῷ Περὶ ποιητῶν [fr. 70] φησιν ὅτι καὶ Ὀμηρικὸς ὁ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς καὶ δεινὸς περὶ τὴν φράσιν γέγονεν, μεταφορητικὸς τε ὢν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις τοῖς περὶ ποιητικὴν ἐπιτεύγμασι χρώμενος.

Aristotle's comments elsewhere give a distinctly different impression.

21. Empedocles has nothing to do with Homer except meter; the first should be called a poet, the other rather a scientist. (Aristotle *Poet.* 1.4447b 17 = DK 31 A22)

οὐδὲν δὲ κοινόν ἐστιν Ὀμήρωι καὶ Ἐμπεδοκλεῖ πλὴν τὸ μέτρον· διὸ τὸν μὲν ποιητὴν δίκαιον καλεῖν, τὸν δὲ φυσιολόγον μᾶλλον ἢ ποιητὴν.

22. [On the requirements of good Greek] . . . The third requirement is to avoid ambiguity, unless indeed the ambiguity is deliberately sought, as it is by those who pretend they have something to say when they have not. Such people usually say it in verse, like Empedocles. Elaborate circumlocutions deceive people who are impressed, as most people are impressed, by prophecies, so that they assent to ambiguous oracles, like, 'If Croesus crosses the river Halys, he will destroy a great kingdom.'⁶⁸ (Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.5.1407a31 = DK 31A25)

τρίτον μὴ ἀμφιβόλοις· ταῦτα δέ, ἂν μὴ τάναντία προαιρῆται, ὅπερ ποιῶσιν ὅταν μὴθὲν μὲν ἔχωσι λέγειν, προσποιῶνται δέ τι λέγειν. οἱ γὰρ τοιοῦτοι ἐν ποιήσει λέγουσιν ταῦτα οἷον Ἐμπεδοκλῆς. φενακίζει γὰρ τὸ κύκλωι πολὺ ὄν, καὶ πάσχουσιν οἱ ἀκροαταὶ ὅπερ οἱ πολλοὶ παρὰ τοῖς μάντεσιν. ὅταν γὰρ λέγωσιν ἀμφίβολα, συμπαραινέουσιν Ἐκροῖσος Ἄλυν διαβάς μεγάλην ἀρχὴν καταλύσει'.

Either Aristotle was inconsistent in his views, or Diogenes Laertius was mistaken in his interpretation.⁶⁹ The possibility of misinterpretation leaves Diogenes Laertius' other statements on the matter in doubt as well.

23. [Aristotle] says that [Empedocles] wrote other poems, in particular on the invasion of Xerxes and a hymn to Apollo, which a sister of his (or, according to Hieronymus, his daughter) afterwards burnt. The hymn she destroyed accidentally, but the poem on the Persian War deliberately, because it was unfinished. And in general terms Aristotle says Empedocles wrote both tragedies and political discourses. But Heraclides, the son of Sarapion, attributes the tragedies to a different author. Hieronymus declares that he had come across forty-three of his plays, while Neanthes tells us that Empedocles wrote these tragedies in his youth, and that he, Neanthes, was acquainted with seven of them. (DL 8.57–58)

καὶ διότι γράψαντος αὐτοῦ καὶ ἄλλα ποιήματα τὴν τε Ξέρξου διάβασιν καὶ προοίμιον εἰς Ἀπόλλωνα, ταῦθ' ὕστερον κατέκαυσεν ἀδελφή τις αὐτοῦ (ἢ θυγάτηρ, ὡς φησιν Ἱερώνυμος [fr. 24 Hiller]), τὸ μὲν προοίμιον ἄκουσα, τὰ δὲ Περσικὰ βουληθεῖσα διὰ τὸ ἀτελείωτα εἶναι. (58) καθόλου δὲ φησι καὶ τραγωιδίας αὐτὸν γράψαι καὶ πολιτικούς· Ἡρακλείδης δὲ ὁ τοῦ Σαραπίωνος ἐτέρου φησὶν εἶναι τὰς τραγωιδίας. Ἱερώνυμος δὲ τρισὶ καὶ τετραράκοντά φησιν ἐντετυχημένα, Νεάνθης [FGrHist. 84 F 27 II 197] δὲ νέον ὄντα γεγραφέναι τὰς τραγωιδίας καὶ αὐτῶν ἑπτὰ ἐντετυχημένα.

According to Aristotle, then, Empedocles wrote not only the two extant philosophical works that we possess, but also a hymn to Apollo, a poem on Xerxes, political works, and tragedies; elsewhere Diogenes Laertius tells us that Empedocles also wrote a medical treatise (DL 8.77). The tragedies were known to two other authors but in differing numbers: Hieronymus knew some forty-three of them, while Neanthes knew only seven and characterized them as a youthful work. Heraclides, on the other hand, attributes the tragedies to another author altogether.

Several incidental details make this report of these otherwise unknown works highly suspect. First, the destruction of work, accidental or intentional, by a family member, was a convenient and popular way to explain gaps or inconsistencies in an author's work and constitutes a topos in poetic and philosophical biography. For example, the biographers tell us that Heraclitus' book perished in a fire and that Homer's daughter lost or destroyed his *Cypria*.⁷⁰ And, although there have been a few attempts to validate the existence of two lost works of Empedocles' (the hymn to Apollo and the poem on Xerxes), the reports of other works are generally considered unreliable. The tradition of a hymn to Apollo most likely

reflects the religious nature of the *Purifications* and Empedocles' poetic and allegorical use of traditional religious terminology, as, for example, in *On Nature*, "Hear, then, the four roots of things, Bright Zeus and life-bearing Hera and Aidoneus and Nestis . . ." (fr. 6).⁷¹

Reports of Empedocles' recitations at festivals would further enforce the idea of a hymn to Apollo. For example, contests at the Pythian festivals, the site of musical and poetic contests would include hymns to Apollo. On the other hand, the poem on Xerxes, like Empedocles' Olympic victories, results from the association of Empedocles with Acragas and Theron. While Xerxes was preparing his campaign against Greece ca. 480 BCE, the Carthaginians were preparing to move against Sicily. Inevitably, the two invasions became intertwined: it was greatly to Xerxes' advantage that the great cities of Sicily, Syracuse and Acragas in particular, were prevented from sending aid east to the allied Greek forces. In 480 BCE, Hamilcar the Carthaginian general attacked the Syracuse troops of Gelon at Himera; the day turned in Sicily's favor when Theron, tyrant of Acragas, joined the attack.⁷² Theron and Acragas, then, played a vital part in the defense of Sicily and indirectly in the defeat of Xerxes. Once again, Acragas' glory was redirected or transferred to its most famous son, Empedocles, whose most plausible inclusion in the event would be to write about it. Discussing the battle of Himera, Bury remarks: "But [the wealth and power of] Acragas brought less glory to Theron than to the name of the most illustrious of her sons, the poet and philosopher Empedocles."⁷³ Theron's role at Himera, considered a deciding factor in Xerxes' defeat, was symbolically transferred to Acragas' most famous citizen in his role as a poet. Empedocles' alleged poem on Xerxes symbolizes and preserves Acragas' moment of greatness.⁷⁴

As for the other works, the political treatise simply corroborates the tradition of Empedocles as a politician, and the medical works (discussed later in this chapter) function in the same way. Empedocles' tragedies, on the other hand, result from the same type of misidentification that made Empedocles an Olympian victor. In this case, as in the misidentified Olympic victories, we are fortunate to have an outside source that identifies another Empedocles, grandson of the philosopher, as the author of some twenty plays. The tragedies, disputed in number as well as existence, are then most likely the work of the philosopher's grandson; their attribution to the philosopher is due either to honest biographical confusion or an equally honest desire to flesh out Empedocles' literary career.⁷⁵

In conclusion, the attribution of these other works is highly question-

able. The poem on Xerxes, the hymn to Apollo, and the political and medical works are all simply different versions of the same impulse that made Empedocles a politician in the biographies: to flesh out and make concrete careers mentioned in citation 12. The various works all corroborate one of those careers (poet, politician, physician), while their alleged destruction accounts for their loss. The very neatness of the scheme, one work for each career, added to the destruction for the works in question, argues against their existence.⁷⁶

The only credible transition of Empedocles as a poet, then, rests upon his extant works, the *Purifications* and *On Nature*. There is no need for further proof of his poetic skill. These two works, in which Empedocles effortlessly employs unusual and striking similes, flowing metrical phrases, and which communicate, with a seamless, natural style, philosophical theory, demonstrate all by themselves a poetic genius that has been admired and praised through the ages. The reports of his other works, like those of his other deaths, have been greatly exaggerated.

Empedocles the Physician

In citation 12, we saw that Empedocles praises four careers: statesman, poet, physician, and prophet. In the preceding sections, we have seen the evidence in Diogenes Laertius for two of those careers, along with the evidence from Empedocles' extant work to support the biographical interpretation of the citation. Empedocles' career as a physician, although better attested than either politician or poet, is yet more complicated through its conflation with his career as a prophet. Most of the anecdotes classified as medical can also be regarded as miraculous, and so, rather than make an artificial division, I will discuss them together in the following section. First, the evidence for the medical career: in Diogenes Laertius, Empedocles is called a physician by Heraclides of Pontus (8.61) and by Satyrus (8.65). Sources outside Diogenes Laertius make Empedocles a physician of the Italian school (Galen), an empirical scientist/physician (Pliny), a famous healer (Celsus), and a skilled practitioner (Iamblichus). Two ancient medical authorities speak of Empedocles: *Ancient Medicine*, with its attack on those who mix the principles and methods of medicine and philosophy, and *Sacred Diseases*, with its discussion of charlatans and miracle workers; Empedocles' inclusion in this discussion is not accidental, but very telling.⁷⁷

From the biographical reports, we would expect Empedocles' work to

reveal medical statements, or at least allusions to medicine, and in this we are not disappointed; some fragments of the *Physics* are, in fact, concerned with respiration and embryology. Despite those interests, however, Empedocles was not a physician but a philosopher, even though ancient and modern authors misleadingly speak of his “enormous influence on medicine.”⁷⁸ While the inference may be valid, given the nature and stature of early philosophical work on all fields of science, accounts of Empedocles’ medical practice are not.⁷⁹ Empedocles’ interest in natural science, especially in respiration and embryology, and the few fragments that record his interest were elaborated by the biographers into medical theory and practice and given concrete anecdotal form. While this practice exists for the philosophers in general, the anecdotes that illustrate Empedocles’ medical work are unusual in both their number and their claims. Furthermore, biographical motives and bias add to the confusion between Empedocles’ “medical career” and that of prophet or *mantis*. Empedocles is described by one biographer as physician and healer, by another as magician and miracle worker, and modern opinions on this point are still divided.⁸⁰ Because the next anecdote describes Empedocles equally as a physician and as a magician, it bridges the gap between this section and the next, which discusses the fourth and last of Empedocles’ careers. Diogenes Laertius uses Satyrus’ statement to introduce this section; it may serve as our starting point as well.

The Holy Fool

24. Satyrus in his *Lives* says that [Empedocles] was both a physician and an outstanding orator . . . he says that Gorgias of Leontini himself was present when Empedocles performed miraculous deeds. And he says that Empedocles claims this and more . . . (DL 8.58–59)

φησὶ δὲ Σάτυρος ἐν τοῖς Βίοις [fr. 12 FHG III 162], ὅτι καὶ ἰατρὸς ἦν καὶ ῥήτωρ ἄριστος. Γοργίαν γοῦν τὸν Λεοντίνιον [82 A 3] . . . αὐτοῦ τοῦτον φησὶν ὁ Σάτυρος λέγειν, ὡς αὐτὸς παρείη τῷ Ἐμπεδοκλεῖ γοητεύοντι. ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸν διὰ τῶν ποιημάτων ἐπαγγέλλεσθαι τοῦτό τε καὶ ἄλλα πλείω . . .

In this passage, we see Empedocles described not only as physician and orator, but as γοης, one who bewitches, fascinates, or plays the wizard; this is not a complimentary characterization, as Wright points out.⁸¹ The most

striking of these “miraculous deeds” occurs in a story known to Hermippus and Heraclides, and told to us by Diogenes Laertius.

25. At all events, Heraclides testifies that the case of the woman in a trance was such that for thirty days Empedocles kept her body alive without breath or pulse. (DL 8.61)

τὴν γοῦν ἄπνουν ὁ Ἡρακλείδης [fr. 72 Voss] φησὶ τοιοῦτόν τι εἶναι, ὡς τριάκοντα ἡμέρας συντηρεῖν ἄπνουν καὶ ἄσφυκτον τὸ σῶμα·

26. Hermippus says that Empedocles healed Pantheia, a woman of Acragas, whom the physicians had given up. (DL 8.69)

Ἐρμιππος [fr. 27 FHG III 42] δέ φησι Πάνθειάν τινα Ἀκραγαντίνην ἀπηλπισμένην ὑπὸ τῶν ἰατρῶν θεραπεῦσαι αὐτὸν καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τὴν θυσίαν ἐπιτελεῖν·

27. Heraclides, when speaking of the woman in the trance, says that Empedocles became famous for sending away living a woman who had been dead. . . . (DL 8.68)

Ἡρακλείδης [fr. 76 Voss] μὲν γὰρ τὰ περὶ τῆς ἄπνου διηγησάμενος, ὡς ἐδοξάσθη Ἐμπεδοκλῆς ἀποστείλας τὴν νεκρὰν ἄνθρωπον ζῶσαν. . . .

The details gleaned from these three accounts are sketchy: the woman is called Pantheia and is healed by Empedocles after the local physicians had given up (Hermippus). She remained in a deathlike trance for thirty days, without pulse or breath, until Empedocles restored her and sent her away, for which he became famous (Heraclides). Satyrus, whose statement in citation 24 introduces Empedocles as a magician, strengthens his claim with a quotation from Empedocles’ work, when he continues:

28. (And Satyrus says that this man himself [Gorgias of Leontini] was present when Empedocles performed his miraculous deeds.) And he says that Empedocles claimed this and more in his poems, in which he says: (DI 8.58–59)

τοῦτόν φησιν ὁ Σάτυρος λέγειν, ὡς αὐτὸς παρείη τῷ Ἐμπεδοκλεῖ γοητεύοντι. ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸν διὰ τῶν ποιημάτων ἐπαγγέλλεσθαι τοῦτό τε καὶ ἄλλα πλείω, δι’ ὧν φησι·

29. You will learn medicines of all kinds and against old age, a remedy
hear—
since for you alone will I complete this tale of many charms.
You will stop the force of the tireless winds, as they sweep across the
earth
shattering crops with their destructive blasts.
Then, should you wish it, you will bring back these winds required.
From murky rain, you will bring a seasonable time
for men and from burning drought, make now the streams that
nourish trees, streams that dwell in the pure upper air.
You will bring back from Hades the strength of a man who has
perished. (fr. 111)

φάρμακα δ' ὅσα γεγάσι κακῶν καὶ γήραος ἄλκαο
πεύσημι, ἐπεὶ μούνωι σοὶ ἐγὼ κρανέω τάδε πάντα.
παύσεις δ' ἀκαμάτων ἀνέμων μένος οἷ τ' ἐπὶ γαῖαν
ὄρνύμενοι πνοαῖσι καταφθινύθουσιν ἀρούρας·
καὶ πάλιν, ἦν ἐθέλησθα, παλίντιτα πνεύματ(α) ἐπάξεις·
θήσεις δ' ἐξ ὄμβροιο κελαινοῦ καίριον αὐχμόν
ἀνθρώποις, θήσεις δὲ καὶ ἐξ αὐχμοῖο θερείου
ῥεύματα δενδρεόθρεπτα, τά τ' αἰθέρι ναίησονται,
ἄξεις δ' ἐξ Ἄϊδαο καταφθιμένου μένος ἀνδρός.

When we began, we saw that Satyrus listed Empedocles' careers as physician and orator, a statement that is immediately followed by the further assertion that Empedocles performed miraculous deeds, that is, that Empedocles was a magician (citations 24 and 28). Satyrus then presents as his proof lines from Empedocles' philosophical work *On Nature* (in citation 29).

The citation from *On Nature* promises, among other things, that Empedocles' pupil (or addressee) will learn to control the winds, rain, and drought and how to bring back from the underworld the strength (μένος) of someone who has perished (καταφθίσθαι). The same word (μένος) describes the strength of both the winds and the dead, and the verb that speaks of the destructive tendency of the wind (καταφθινύθουσιν) is a related form of the verb used of human destruction (καταφθιμένου). The citation suggests that both respiration and the winds can be controlled and made to return at will and that, if breath is returned to the body, so is life. Furthermore, the citation suggests that the speaker has the power to control these natural forces through his knowledge of them.

According to the citation, moreover, neither life nor death is a permanent, fixed state. Instead there exist only subtle alterations between two similar states. This is further suggested by Empedocles' remarks on the mutability of the elements, the alternation between the destructive force of the winds and their necessary (requited) presence, between wet and dry, life and death.

This reading takes on still greater force if read, as is proper, in conjunction with other parts of Empedocles' work.

30. And I will tell you something else: creation exists for no mortal thing whatsoever, nor is there any end in destroying death. Rather, there exists only the mingling and the separation of things joined, and the name applied to this by man is nature. (fr. 8)

ἄλλο δέ τοι ἐρέω· φύσις οὐδενὸς ἔστιν ἀπάντων
θνητῶν, οὐδέ τις οὐλομένου θανάτοιο τελευτή,
ἀλλὰ μόνον μίξις τε διάλλαξις τε μιγέντων
ἔστι, φύσις δ' ἐπὶ τοῖς ὀνομάζεται ἀνθρώποισιν.

31. But when the parts are mingled together in a man and come into the light, or into the family of wild animals or shrubs, or into birds, this, then, they call creation, as when they separate, this they call ill-fated death. Themis does not call it so but even I, through convention, apply this term. (fr. 9)

οἱ δ' ὅτε μὲν κατὰ φῶτα μιγέντ' εἰς αἰθέρ' ἴ<κωνται>
ἢ κατὰ θηρῶν ἀγροτέρων γένος ἢ κατὰ θάμνων
ἢ κατ' οἰωνῶν, τότε μὲν τὸ <λέγουσι> γενέσθαι,
εὖτε δ' ἀποκρινθῶσι, τὸ δ' αὖ δυσδαίμονα πότμον·
ἢ θέμις <οὐ> καλέουσι, νόμῳ δ' ἐπίφημι καὶ αὐτός.

32. The fools. For they have no long-reaching thought but believe something not existing before comes into being, or that something dies away and perishes utterly. (fr. 11)

νήπιοι' οὐ γάρ σφιν δολιχόφρονές εἰσι μέριμναι,
οἷ δὴ γίγνεσθαι πάρος οὐκ ἔδον ἐλπίζουσιν
ἢ τι καταθνήσκειν τε καὶ ἐξόλλυσθαι ἀπάντη.

These three fragments, like citation 29, deny the existence of absolute life and death. Most people are aware only of the outward signs of regeneration and decay and so speak of life and death as fixed and absolute states. Having no deeper or more real knowledge of these forces, they cannot control them. The speaker, on the other hand, sees beyond appearances into the changing and interrelated nature of all things and has and can teach control of these elements.

In the discussion of these citations, I have been careful to designate the first-person “I” of citation 29 as the speaker; the biographers, however, would immediately identify the “I” as Empedocles himself. Their methods, which first require an autobiographical reading of the fragment, next require a concrete anecdote to flesh it out, as the Pantheia anecdotes bear out. There, only Empedocles can bring the woman back to a “living state.” The other physicians, ordinary men who cannot recognize the subtle gradations between life and death but by their inability perceive only two absolute states of life and death, have given up. Empedocles, according to the biographers, because of his greater knowledge, is able not only to see the connection between the two states, but to control them (just as he can control the winds through his knowledge of them) and thus control life and death itself. He has, in fact, brought back the “necessary force,” the μένος, of one who has perished, “καταφθιμένου.” Diogenes Laertius follows the Pantheia anecdote with more of Heraclides’ comments on Empedocles and another quotation to bolster Heraclides’ point.

33. At all events, Heraclides testifies that the case of the woman in a trance was such that for three days he kept her body [alive] without breath or pulse; and for that reason Heraclides calls him not merely a physician but a holy man (i.e., μαντις) as well, deriving the titles from the following line also: (DL 8.61–62)

τὴν γοῦν ἄπνουν ὁ Ἡρακλείδης [fr. 72 Voss] φησὶ τοιοῦτόν τι εἶναι, ὡς
τριακόντα ἡμέρας συντηρεῖν ἄπνουν καὶ ἄσφυκτον τὸ σῶμα· ὅθεν
εἶπεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἱητρον καὶ μάντιν, λαμβάνων ἅμα καὶ ἀπὸ τούτων τῶν
στίχων·

Friends, who dwell in the great town above tawny Acragas,
upon the city's citadel, busy in your good works,
you who are reverent harbors for strangers and strangers to evil,
Greeting. I go among you an immortal god, no longer mortal,
but honored among all men, appropriately,
wreathed in ribbons and fresh garlands.

I am honored by men and women; they follow me
by the thousands, seeking the advantageous way,
some desiring prophecy, others, against all sorts of diseases,
ask to learn a well-pointed saying,
having suffered too long in their painful distress.

(fr. 112 = citation 10)

ὦ φίλοι, οἱ μέγα ἄστῳ κατὰ ξανθοῦ Ἀκράγαντος
ναίετ' ἀν' ἄκρα πόλεος, ἀγαθῶν μελεδήμονες ἔργων,
ξείνων αἰδοῖοι λιμένες, κακότητος ἄπειροι,
χαίρετ'· ἐγὼ δ' ὑμῖν θεὸς ἄμβροτος, οὐκέτι θνητός
πωλεῦμαι μετὰ πᾶσι τετιμένος, ὥσπερ ἔοικα,
ταινίαις τε περίστεπτος στέφεσίν τε θαλείοις.
τοῖσιν † ἄμ' † ἂν ἴκωμαι ἄστεα τηλεθάοντα,
ἀνδράσιν ἠδὲ γυναιξί, σεβίζομαι· οἱ δ' ἄμ' ἔπονται
μυριοὶ ἐξερέοντες, ὅπῃ πρὸς κέρδος ἀταρπός,
οἱ μὲν μαντοσυνέων κεχρημένοι, οἱ δ' ἐπὶ νόσων
παντοίων ἐπύθοντο κλυεῖν εὐηγέα βάξιν,
δηρὸν δὴ χαλεπήσι πεπαρμένοι <ἄμφ' ὀδύνησιν>.

As we saw earlier, this fragment provided the biographers with ample proof of Empedocles' career as physician, with its promises of remedies and cures. However, it also provides proof of other powers and another career mentioned by Empedocles in fragment 112, that of *μαντις*, which I translate as “holy man” in an attempt to preserve the word's ambiguity. *Mantis* means “diviner,” “prophet,” or “seer.” Heraclides perhaps uses the term favorably in citation 33 to credit Empedocles with marvelous skills in healing, again suggesting the link between the natural philosopher and the medical man.⁸² In citation 24, however, when Satyrus describes Empedocles as an orator and physician who “perform[s] miraculous deeds,” he uses the verb *γοητεύω*, which is much less favorable, meaning to “beguile,” “bewitch,” or “to play the wizard.” Moreover, the biographers' combination

of orator and physician, unlike seer and physician, or prophet and physician, typically indicates a charlatan.⁸³ Diogenes Laertius, certainly, means this part of the biography to illustrate Empedocles' career as a wizard or magician, as his next anecdote in this section reveals.

34. Timaeus too, in his eighteenth book of the *Histories*, says that Empedocles was admired on many grounds. For example, when the etesian winds began to blow violently and damage the crops, he ordered donkeys flayed and their skin made into sacks. He stretched them here and there on the hills to catch the winds, and because he stopped it, was called the 'wind-stopper.'⁸⁴ (DL 8.60)

φησὶ δὲ καὶ Τίμαιος ἐν τῇ ὀκτωκαιδεκάτῃ [fr. 94 FHG I 215] κατὰ πολλοὺς τρόπους τεθαιμάσθαι τὸν ἄνδρα. καὶ γὰρ ἐτησίῳ ποτὲ σφοδρῶς πνευσάντων ὡς τοὺς καρποὺς λυμῆναι, κελύσας ὄνους ἐκδαρῆναι καὶ ἄσκούς ποιῆσαι περὶ τοὺς λόφους καὶ τὰς ἀκρωρείας διέτεινε πρὸς τὸ συλλαβεῖν τὸ πνεῦμα· λήξαντος δὲ κωλυσανέμαν κληθῆναι.

We have already seen that Empedocles' belief in metempsychosis prohibits bloodshed; citation 7, in fact, explicitly warns against the slaughter of animals. Yet here we have an anecdote in which Empedocles not only kills animals but flays them for their skins. Not surprisingly, the anecdote comes from Timaeus, whom we have identified as a hostile, and therefore probably unreliable, source. If this were the only record of such an act, we could perhaps dismiss it, but other anecdotes, in which Empedocles uses his control of the elements to save cities from plague, crops from destruction, and women from miscarriage, must give us pause.⁸⁵ The details of these cures through control of wind and water, like the description of Empedocles as holy man and magician, are obviously taken from his words in citation 29; in each of these miraculous acts, Empedocles uses his knowledge of the elements to control them, for the benefit of the people. His knowledge and power, in these several anecdotes, once more imply Empedocles' control over the forces of life and death, as symbolized by his rescue of the people from potentially deadly states. In the smaller details of these accounts (the barren women, miscarriages, winds) we see once more Empedocles' interest in embryology and respiration, constant symbols of life and death.⁸⁶ Finally, these heroic, god-like actions by which the philosopher saves his fellow citizens make up a common topos in the favorable tradition of philosophical biography. A quite similar anecdote occurs for

Democritus: having saved his fellow citizens from plague and destructive winds, he is honored as a god.⁸⁷ (An honor much like this is offered Empedocles for similar reasons, as we will see.) The ability to control the elements is frequently attributed to the early philosophers. Their interest in the physical world and especially in meteorology is translated into magical powers over natural forces. Quite often they are deified for these powers. The very frequency with which such anecdotes occur, however, argues against their credibility in any individual case.⁸⁸

The tradition of Empedocles' career as physician and "prophet," as demonstrated, comes from Empedocles' own words examined earlier in citation **12**.

Finally, then, prophets and poets and physicians,
and princes among mortal men are they wont to be,
blossoming forth from this state to become gods, greatest in honor.
(fr. 146)

εἰς δὲ τέλος μάντις τε καὶ ὕμνοπόλοι καὶ ἰητροί
καὶ πρόμοι ἀνθρώποισιν ἐπιχθονίοισι πέλονται,
ἔνθεν ἀναβλαστοῦσι θεοὶ τιμῆσι φέριστοι.

Empedocles' career as physician, like his other careers, originates in this fragment. His medical interests, shared by other early philosophers and indicated by those fragments that speak of respiration and embryology, were elaborated into anecdotes in which Empedocles "heals" Pantheia and saves "the people." In some instances, the anecdotes form a favorable tradition that speaks of Empedocles as a physician whose knowledge and power benefits the people. In other instances, interpretation of citation **12** was colored by a hostile reaction to those fragments in which Empedocles was thought to claim divine status and prerogatives. This hostile reading results in the unfavorable tradition that makes Empedocles a charlatan and magician. Empedocles' own use of mantis in citation **12** allowed Satyrus to label him a magician and Timaeus to produce anecdotes which negated Empedocles' stated philosophic and religious beliefs. Diogenes Laertius' placement of his material provides an illustrative structure: in 8.58 (citation **24**), Satyrus says Gorgias was present when Empedocles performed miraculous deeds. In 8.59 (citation **28**), Satyrus says Empedocles claimed these magic powers and more in his philosophy, to prove which he quotes citation **29**. In 8.60, Diogenes Laertius presents Timaeus'

anecdote about the winds (citation 34). In 8.61 (citation 25), we have Heraclides' report of Pantheia and Diogenes Laertius' explanation of Heraclides' use of the term *mantis* "at all events, Heraclides testifies that the case of the woman in a trance." Diogenes Laertius then includes Empedocles' own words in citation 29 as proof. Clearly, the biographers intend to show Empedocles not as a holy man but as a magician. The tradition of Empedocles as physician has become hopelessly confused with anecdotes of Empedocles the magician, based on control of natural elements and forces such as wind and water, life and death. Empedocles' last two careers, prophet and physician, like those of politician and poet, are nothing more than the biographers' embellishment of the professions listed in citation 12, colored by reactions to citation 10 ("I go among you an immortal god. . .")

THE DEATHS OF EMPEDOCLES

Now that we have examined the various aspects of Empedocles' family, character, and career, we must consider his various deaths. His spectacular descent into Etna is the best known of his several deaths, but by no means the only one: the biographers have given us several deaths to choose from, and all have more or less merit. But no matter how banal some deaths seem compared with Etna, all deserve our attention, for even the variant deaths go back to Empedocles' work. Our analysis of them provides insight into biographical reaction and interpretation of the philosophical work. In Empedocles' case, as one might suspect, the belief in metempsychosis and the denial of death as an absolute state underlie the various necrologies. The various deaths are presented by Diogenes Laertius as follows:

35. Demetrius of Troezen in his work *Against the Sophists* says that Empedocles, as Homer puts it, 'fastening a steep noose from a lofty dogwood, / let fall his neck and sent his soul to Hades.' (DL 8.74)

Δημήτριος δ' ὁ Τροϊζήνιος ἐν τῷ Κατὰ σοφιστῶν βιβλίῳ [FHG IV 383] φησὶν αὐτὸν καθ' Ὅμηρον [1 278] ἀψάμενον βρόχον αἰπὺν ἀφ' ὑψηλοῦ κρᾶνείης ἀχέν' ἀποκρεμάσαι, ψυχὴν <δ> Ἀϊδόσδε κατελθεῖν.

36. Later, when he was traveling in a carriage to a festival in Messene, he fell and broke his hip. Becoming ill from this he died, at age seventy-seven. His tomb is in Megara. (DL 8.73)

ὑστερον δὲ διὰ τινὰ πανήγυριν πορευόμενον ἐπ' ἀμάξης ὡς εἰς Μεσσήνην πεσεῖν καὶ τὸν μηρὸν κλάσαι· νοσήσαντα δ' ἐκ τούτου τελευτήσαι ἑπτὰ καὶ ἑβδομήκοντα. εἶναι δ' αὐτοῦ καὶ τάφον ἐν Μεγάρους.

37. In Telauges' letter, he says that Empedocles' fell into the sea and drowned, because of his age. (DL 8.74)

ἐν τῷ προειρημένῳ [C 14 53, 55] Τηλαύγου ἐπιστολίῳ λέγεται αὐτὸν εἰς θάλατταν ὑπὸ γήρως ὀλισθόντα τελευτήσαι.

It is not unusual for a philosopher to have more than one death; death was a favorite topic for the biographers and entire collections were devoted to famous or unusual deaths.⁸⁹ Biographical death, however, is always telling, because it is always drawn from the subject's work, and indicative of the biographers' reaction to that work.⁹⁰ The biographers' hostility seems especially to emerge in the death stories; rarely does death glorify its subject.

Biographical death in general shows more malice than anecdotes that discuss the living, but their ultimate source is the same, the philosophical thoughts and beliefs that are expressed in the subject's work. These philosophical statements are then interpreted personally and autobiographically. For the biographers, death was the ideal and ultimate opportunity to refute and negate all that the subject expressed in his work.⁹¹ Examples of the biographical tradition are well known from poetry. Even "good" authors are fair game for the parody of death. Aeschylus, for example, dies when a tortoise shell falls on his head (the tortoise shell was used in antiquity for the lyre on which Aeschylus would have composed or sung his work). For "bad" poets like Euripides, death is a fearful thing: he is torn apart by dogs (as becomes a heretic) or by women (angry at his portrayal of them in the *Medea* and elsewhere). Many of the philosophers' deaths are frankly hostile, such as the death of Heraclitus who, almost universally regarded as misanthropic, dies like an animal, buried in dung.⁹² Pythagoras, who admonishes his disciples to stay away from beans, dies as a result of his refusal to cross a bean field. Empedocles' several deaths are also peculiarly appropriate to him, although the allusions are less obvious. The most malicious of Empedocles' deaths is that of suicide, which clearly arises from a desire to refute and punish Empedocles for his "claim," in citation 10, fragment 112, "I go among you an immortal god." In similar manner, more than one biographer slyly suggests that Empedocles was

driven by his own arrogance to prove his immortality by jumping into Etna, as later interpretation will show.

In the tradition of Empedocles' suicide, we have a perfect example of a hostile biographical reaction to a philosopher's work, expressed in anecdotes that at once negate the work and punish the author.⁹³ In Empedocles' case, suicide further punishes Empedocles for his boast of a unique understanding of the cosmos and control over its forces, as discussed in citations 28 and 33.⁹⁴ It certainly negates his stance against killing and mocks his belief in metempsychosis.⁹⁵ All of Empedocles' deaths function in this manner: words are taken from his philosophy, turned against him, and made the instrument of his death. For example, citations 36 and 37 further punish Empedocles by ridiculing his claim to divinity. It is not a god but an all too humanly fragile man who drowns or falls and breaks his hip and dies. So much for immortality.

The death by drowning seems odd, until we consider certain fragments that the biographers must have found particularly ludicrous and are therefore worth of special attention.

38. For by now I have been boy and girl,
plant and bird and mute sea-fish. (fr. 117).

ἤδη γάρ ποτ' ἐγὼ γενόμεν κοῦρός τε κόρη τε
θάμνος τ' οἰωνός τε καὶ ἔξαλος ἔλλοπος ἰχθύς.

Another fragment, similar in language and perhaps in intent, shows that the different incarnations are an integral part of the cosmic cycle and that all existing forms share the same origin.

39. . . . for from these [elements] all things exist, that were and are and
will be,
the trees burst forth, and men and women,
beasts and birds and mute sea-fish,
and the gods, long-lived and highest in honor.
for these [elements] alone exist but by running through one another
become different; to such a degree does mixing change them.
(fr. 21.9–14)

. . . ἐκ τούτων γὰρ πάνθ' ὅσα τ' ἦν ὅσα τ' ἔστι καὶ ἔσται,
δένδρεά τ' ἐβλάστησε καὶ ἀνέρες ἠδὲ γυναῖκες,
θήρες τ' οἰωνοὶ τε καὶ ὕδατοθρέμμονες ἰχθύς,

καί τε θεοὶ δολιχαίωνες τιμῆσι φέριστοι.
 αὐτὰ γὰρ ἔστιν ταῦτα, δι' ἀλλήλων δὲ θέοντα
 γίγνεται ἀλλοιωπά' τόσον διὰ κρήσις ἀμείβει.

Citation 38, divorced from a biographical interpretation, announces various incarnations, male and female, plant and animal, that befall a soul in its cycle. Citation 39 also lists different forms, trees, men, women, birds, beasts, and fish, that share a single origin. Citation 39 goes further, however, in that it mentions the gods as also having burst forth from the common pool of elements in their various transformations. The inclusion of the gods in citation 39 argues for their (philosophical and implicit) inclusion in citation 38 as well; the similarity in thought and expression in the two fragments is obvious. Together the two fragments give a further clue to our understanding of citation 10 and the biographers' reaction to it: "Greetings. I go among you an immortal god, no longer mortal." To a well-read biographer, the next step in the procession of forms in citation 38 would be that of citation 39, from mortal to immortal. Clearly, to their way of thinking, it was a step Empedocles claimed to have taken. Death by drowning, then, is a wonderfully appropriate death for a philosopher who claimed to have been not only a god but a fish as well.

These three deaths have in common then the desire to punish Empedocles for his claim to divinity or for some part of his philosophy: his denial of death, his control over the elements (significantly lacking in his fall to earth and drowning), the transmigration of the soul into various forms, or the prohibition against violence and killing. Since Empedocles has now died by land, by sea, and by suicide, we turn towards Etna. Diogenes Laertius offers us several versions of this famous death.

40. Hermippus tells us that Empedocles cured Pantheia, a woman of Acragas who had been given up by the physicians, and this was why he [Empedocles] was offering sacrifice, and that those who had been invited were about eighty in number. Hippobotus, again, says that when Empedocles got up, he set out on his way to Etna; then, upon reaching it, plunged into its fiery craters and disappeared, his intention being to confirm the report that he had become a god. Afterwards, the truth was known, because one of his sandals was thrown up in the flames; it had been his custom to wear bronze sandals. (DL 8.69)

Ἑρμιππος [fr. 27 FHG III 42] δέ φησι Πάνθειάν τινα Ἀκραγαντίνην ἀπηλπισμένην ὑπὸ τῶν ἰατρῶν θεραπεύσαι αὐτὸν καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τὴν

θυσίαν ἐπιτελεῖν· τοὺς δὲ κληθέντας εἶναι πρὸς τοὺς ὀγδοήκοντα. Ἴππόβοτος [Heraclides fr. 77 Voss] δὲ φησιν ἕξαναστάντα αὐτὸν ὠδευ-
κέναι ὡς ἐπὶ τὴν Αἴτνην, εἶτα παραγενόμενον ἐπὶ τοὺς κρατήρας τοῦ
πυρὸς ἐναλέσθαι καὶ ἀφανισθῆναι, βουλόμενον τὴν περὶ αὐτοῦ φήμην
βεβαιῶσαι ὅτι γέγονοι θεός, ὕστερον δὲ γνωσθῆναι, ἀναρριπισθείσης
αὐτοῦ μιᾶς τῶν κρηπίδων· χαλκᾶς γὰρ εἶθιστο ὑποδεῖσθαι. πρὸς τοῦθ'
ὁ Πανσανίας ἀντέλεγε.

41. Diodorus of Ephesus says that . . . the people of Selinus suffered from a plague because of the miasma of the nearby river, and that the men perished and the women died in childbirth, and so Empedocles thought of diverting two rivers, at his own expense, and so, by mixing them, made the water sweet. When the plague had vanished and the people of Selinus were feasting on the river bank, Empedocles appeared. The people, rising up, worshipped and prayed to him as a god. And he, wishing to confirm their belief, leapt into the fire. (DL 8.70)

Διόδωρος δ' ὁ Ἐφέσιος φησὶν . . . τοῖς Σελινουντίοις ἐμπεσόντος λοιμοῦ διὰ τὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ παρακειμένου ποταμοῦ δυσωδίας, ὥστε καὶ αὐτοὺς φθειρεσθαι καὶ τὰς γυναῖκας δυστοκεῖν, ἐπινοῆσαι τὸν Ἐμπεδοκλέα καὶ δύο τινὰς ποταμοὺς τῶν σύνεγγυς ἐπαγαγεῖν ἰδίαις δαπάναις· καὶ καταμίξαντα γλυκῆναι τὰ ρεύματα. οὕτω δὴ λήξαντος τοῦ λοιμοῦ καὶ τῶν Σελινουντίων εὐωχουμένων ποτὲ παρὰ τῷ ποταμῷ, ἐπιφανῆναι τὸν Ἐμπεδοκλέα· τοὺς δ' ἕξαναστάντας προσκυνεῖν καὶ προσεύχεσθαι καθαπερὲ θεῷ. ταύτην οὖν θέλοντα βεβαιῶσαι τὴν διάληψιν εἰς τὸ πῦρ ἐναλέσθαι.

The common elements in the two anecdotes are immediately apparent; both speak of a cure, a feast, and a sacrifice. The common hostility of the two accounts is also immediately apparent in Empedocles' desire to prove himself a god; it is this desire that, in both accounts, leads to his final act of grandstanding and propels him into Etna.⁹⁶ The “cures,” as we have seen, illustrate and make concrete Empedocles' interest in respiration, embryology, and the curative powers that result from control of the elements. They further embody several strands of Empedocles' philosophy and biography, his refutation of death as an absolute state (citations 30, 31, and 32); his control over wind and water (citation 29); and his career as a physician/magician/champion of the people (citations 13, 14, 15, 24, and 28). It also provides for, and ridicules, his “fifth” career; we remember

that in citation 12, after being prince and poet, prophet and physician, the best men go on to become gods, greatest in glory. Both accounts of his death at Etna emphasize Empedocles' determination to prove that he has reached this state. In a theatrical, vainglorious attempt to prove himself a god, he throws himself into the flames of Etna. The anecdotes of his death, then, continue to deride Empedocles' character when they speak of this desire, while they ridicule his claim in citation 10, of having reached the final state of divinity.⁹⁷ Diogenes Laertius' epigram on the subject distills the hostility of the biographers which occasioned the story.

42. And you, Empedocles, did purify your limbs with quick
flame and drank fire from immortal bowls.
I do not say that you willingly jumped into Etna's streams,
but that, not wishing to be found out, you jumped in. (DL 8.75 =
AP 7.123)

καὶ οὐ ποτ', Ἐμπεδόκλεις, διερχῆ φλογὶ σῶμα καθήρας
πῦρ ἀπὸ κρητήρων ἔκπιες ἀθανάτων·
οὐκ ἐρέω δ' ὅτι σαυτὸν ἐκὼν βάλες ἐς ἑρόον Αἴτνης,
ἀλλὰ λαθεῖν ἐθέλων ἔμπεισες οὐκ ἐθέλων. (DL 8.75 = AP 7.123)

With the tradition of Empedocles' jump into Etna, its method and motive compressed in Diogenes Laertius' epigram, a curious pattern begins to take shape. We have seen, in various citations, Empedocles' boasted (biographical) control over the elements. In the previous anecdotes, we have seen death by water, by earth, and, with Etna, by fire. Turning to Empedocles' work, we find a fragment that seems uncannily appropriate to these deaths. In Diogenes Laertius' text, the epigram appears shortly before his introduction to Empedocles' theory of the four elements, or roots, of all things.

43. For hear, first of all the roots of all things—
Zeus and bright-shining Hera and Aidoneus who gives life,
and Nestis too who, with her tears, moistens the mortal stream.
(fr. 6)

τέσσαρα γὰρ πάντων ῥιζώματα πρότον ἄκουε·
Ζεὺς ἀργῆς Ἥρη τε φερέσβιος ἠδ' Ἄιδωνεύς
Νῆστις θ', ἧ δακρῶις τέγγει κρούνωμα βρότειον.

The four elements, fire, air, earth, and water, which Empedocles poetically designates using traditional divine names, are in Empedocles' system the four roots or sources of all things that exist.⁹⁸ The elements are acted upon by the opposing forces of Love and Strife; they are moved and changed and have their existence according to which force is ascendant. Another of Empedocles' fragments speaks of the changes that occur under the rule of Strife and (metaphorically) about the changes that it brings for the soul.

44. There exists Necessity's decree, an ancient resolution of the gods,
timeless, immortal, made fast by broad oath,
that, whenever one in sin defiles his limbs with bloodshed,
who quarrels and in error, makes falsely sworn his oath,
then the daimons, who have as their portion long-lasting life,
make him wander, far from the blessed gods, for thrice a thousand
seasons,
being born in all sorts of mortal shapes throughout this time,
changing in turn the grievous paths of living.
For the strength of the air chases him into the ocean,
and the ocean, in its turn, spews him forth onto dry land; the earth
into the rays of glowing sun, and aether next hurl him deep into the
vortex.
One after another, in turn they receive him, but all hate him.
I now am one of these, a fugitive from the gods and a wanderer,
having put my faith in mad Strife. (fr. 115)

ἔστιν Ἀνάγκης χρῆμα, θεῶν ψήφισμα παλαιόν,
αἰδιον, πλατέεσσι κατεσφρηγισμένον ὄρκοις·
εὐτέ τις ἀμπλακίησι φόνωι φίλα γυῖα μίηνη,
<νείκεϊ θ'> ὅς κ(ε) ἐπίορκον ἀμαρτήσας ἐπομόσση,
δαίμονες οἶτε μακροαῖωνος λελάχασι βίοιο,
τρῖς μιν μυρίας ὥρας ἀπὸ μακάρων ἀλάλησθαι,
φυομένους παντοῖα διὰ χρόνου εἶδεα θνητῶν
ἀργαλέας βιώτοιο μεταλλάσσοντα κελεύθους.
αἰθέριον μὲν γάρ σφε μένος πόντονδε διώκει,
πόντος δ' ἐς χθονὸς οὐδας ἀπέπτυσσε, γαῖα δ' ἐς ἀνγὰς
ἡελίου φαέθοντος, ὃ δ' αἰθέρος ἔμβαλε δίναις·
ἄλλος δ' ἐξ ἄλλου δέχεται, στυγέουσι δὲ πάντες.
τῶν καὶ ἐγὼ νῦν εἶμι, φυγὰς θεόθεν καὶ ἀλήτης,
νείκεϊ μαινομένοι πίσυνος.

In this fragment, the heat and fire combine to thrust the sinful wanderer deep into the vortex. In citations 40 and 41, Empedocles' desire for divinity thrusts him deep into the heat and fire of Etna. In the deaths by land and water, citations 36 and 37, we see that the other elements deny Empedocles' control over them and, as in citation 44, exert their power over him; he is forced into the ocean where he drowns and to the ground where he breaks his hip and dies. In short, the elements that he describes in citation 44, and over which he is supposed to have control in citation 29, drive him pitilessly, as in citation 44, to his death. What, then, of the fourth element, air? At least one biographer anticipated the question.

45. And Heraclides, after telling the story of the woman in the trance, and that Empedocles became famous for sending away living a dead woman, says that he was offering sacrifice near the field of Peisianax. Then after the feast, when some of the friends who had been invited apart to rest, some under trees in a nearby field, some where they chose, Empedocles himself remained there on the spot where he had feasted. And when it became day, he could not be found. A search was undertaken and the servants questioned, but they hadn't seen him, and then someone said that in the middle of the night he had heard a loud voice calling Empedocles. Then he had gotten up and had seen a light in the sky and a glittery flame, but nothing else. All those who heard this were amazed at what had happened, and Pausanias came down and sent the people out searching. Later, though, he ordered them to trouble themselves no more, saying that something worthy of prayer had happened, and that they ought to sacrifice to Empedocles, since he had become a god. (DL 8.67–68)

Ἡρακλείδης [fr. 76 Voss] μὲν γὰρ τὰ περὶ τῆς ἄπνου διηγησάμενος, ὡς ἐδοξάσθη Ἐμπεδοκλῆ ἀποστείλας τὴν νεκρὰν ἄνθρωπον ζῶσαν, φησὶν ὅτι θυσίαν συνετέλει πρὸς τῷ Πεισιάνακτος ἀγρῷ. συνεκέληντο δὲ τῶν φίλων τινές, ἐν οἷς καὶ Πausανίας. εἶτα μετὰ τὴν εὐωχίαν οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι χωρισθέντες ἀνεπαύοντο, οἱ μὲν ὑπὸ τοῖς δένδροις ὡς ἀγροῦ παρακαμμένου, οἱ δ' ὅπῃ βούλοιντο, αὐτὸς δὲ ἔμεινεν ἐπὶ τοῦ τόπου ἐφ' οὗπερ κατεκέλιτο. ὡς δὲ ἡμέρας γενηθείσης ἐξανέστησαν, οὐχ ἠύρεθη μόνος. ζητουμένου δὲ καὶ τῶν οἰκετῶν ἀνακρινόμενων καὶ φασκόντων μὴ εἰδέναι, εἷς τις ἔφη μέσων νυκτῶν φωνῆς ὑπερμεγέθους ἀκοῦσαι προσκαλουμένης Ἐμπεδοκλέα, εἶτα ἐξαναστὰς ἐωρακέναι φῶς οὐράνιον καὶ λαμπάδων φέγγος, ἄλλο δὲ μηδέν τῶν δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ γενομένοι ἐκπλαγέντων καταβὰς ὁ Πausανίας ἔπεμψε τινὰς ζητήσοντας.

ὑστερον δὲ ἐκώλυεν πολυπραγμονεῖν, φάσκων εὐχῆς ἄξια συμβεβηκέναι καὶ θύειν αὐτῷ δεῖν καθαπερεὶ γεγονότι θεῷ.

This story, like the Etna anecdotes, occurs after a feast and sacrifice that celebrate one of Empedocles' miraculous cures. It lacks, however, the motivation offered in those anecdotes; here there is no mention of Empedocles' unworthy desire to prove himself a god. Rather, the people rise up in spontaneous worship of him when he appears. We have not vanity but apotheosis: a loud voice calling from heaven, a light in the sky, Empedocles' disappearance.⁹⁹ He has, in fact, been taken up into his fourth, bright, shining element, air, the realm of pure spirit and mind. Empedocles' philosophical system has destroyed and delivered him, and his fifth career, that of a god, has begun.

A few details make the anecdote particularly appropriate, and pleasing. His "student" Pausanias is present, the man whom Empedocles addresses in the opening statement of his work.¹⁰⁰ This is the man to whom Empedocles promises wisdom and understanding which far surpasses that of ordinary men, a promise fulfilled when Pausanias alone understands what has happened to his teacher. The student has taken Empedocles' lessons to heart, especially that of citation 12, which makes the transition from mortal to immortal the final step of the five-part progression. He alone understands that Empedocles has passed into a higher sphere and is now due the honors of a god. Empedocles' disappearance into the ether gloriously asserts his refutation of death and gives new force to his theory of the mutability of the elements and the soul's progression in transmigration. His apotheosis, which glorifies the philosopher and negates the vain and theatrical gesture of the Etna anecdotes, completes the biographers' use of the four elements. Empedocles dies by water, by earth, by fire, and by air; his elemental death, like his soul's progression, is complete.

Needless to say, neither his apotheosis nor his more famous death in Etna were acceptable or even believable to all. That the strongest censure should come from the ever hostile Timaeus is no surprise. Diogenes Laertius presents Timaeus' objections and his own, which are again couched in epigrammatic form.

46. Timaeus contradicts these stories and stoutly asserts that Empedocles left for the Peloponnesus and never returned; this is the reason, he says, that he died in some obscure manner. He answers Heraclides, whom he mentions by name, in his fourteenth book: Peisianax was a citizen of

Syracuse and had no land at Acragas. Furthermore, if this story were circulating, Pausanias would have set up a monument to his friend, as to a god, in a statue or shrine, for he was a wealthy man. “How came Empedocles,” says Timaeus, “to jump into the craters, when he never once mentions them, although they were not far away? He must, therefore, have died in the Peloponnesus. It is not at all surprising that his tomb is not found, the same is true of many men.” (DL 8.71)

τούτοις δ' ἐναντιοῦται Τίμαιος [fr. 98 FHG I 218] ῥητῶς λέγων ὡς ἐξεχώρησεν εἰς Πελοπόννησον καὶ τὸ σύνολον οὐκ ἐπανήλθεν ὅθεν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν τελευτὴν ἄδηλον εἶναι. πρὸς δὲ τὸν Ἡρακλείδην καὶ ἐξ ὀνόματος ποιεῖται τὴν ἀντίρρησιν ἐν τῇ ἰδ' Συρακόσιόν τε γὰρ εἶναι τὸν Πεισιάνακτα καὶ ἀγρὸν οὐκ ἔχειν ἐν Ἀκράγαντι. Παισιανίαν τε μνημεῖον <ἄν> πεποιημέναι τοῦ φίλου, τοιοῦτου διαδοθέντος λόγου, ἢ ἀγαλμάτιόν τι ἢ σηκὸν οἶα θεοῦ· καὶ γὰρ πλούσιον εἶναι. ἴπως οὖν, φησὶν, εἰς τοὺς κρατήρας ἦλατο ὧν οὐνεγγυς ὃν των οὐδὲ μνεῖαν ποτὲ ἐπεποίητο; τετελεύτηκεν οὖν ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ. (72) οὐδὲν δὲ παρὰδοξον τάφον αὐτοῦ μὴ φαίνεσθαι· μηδὲ γὰρ ἄλλων πολλῶν.'

47. And there is a story told of Empedocles' death, that from a carriage he fell and broke his right thigh.

But if he leapt into the fiery craters and drank in life,
how is it that his tomb is shown in Megara? (DL 8.75)

ναὶ μὴν Ἐμπεδοκλήα θανεῖν λόγος ὥς ποτ' ἀμάξης
ἔλπεσε καὶ μηρὸν κλάσσατο δεξιτερόν,
εἰ δὲ πυρὸς κρατήρας ἐσήλατο καὶ πίε τὸ ζῆν,
πῶς ἂν ἔτ' ἐν Μεγάρῳις δείκνυτο τοῦδε τάφος;

The tomb in Megara is also mentioned by Favorinus in citation 36 and speaks once again of the historical importance of the Sicilian tyrants with whom Empedocles is so strongly associated. Megara played an important part in Sicilian history, due to Gelon's repopulation of Syracuse, ca. 491 BCE. Gelon's recruitment of settlers from Megara led to its fame as an “outpost of Sicily.”¹⁰¹ The Megarians, no doubt, were eager to claim, and probably to show, the tomb of Sicily's most famous son. The carriage fall also mentioned in citation 36 may allude to Empedocles' “exile,” as does Timaeus' claim that Empedocles died “somewhere in the Peloponnesus.”¹⁰² But Timaeus' purpose in making this statement is openly hostile. By suggesting that Empedocles' place of death is unknown, he diminishes

Empedocles' importance, especially when he reduces Empedocles to the rank of "many other men;" extraordinary men do not die "obscure deaths." Timaeus' other objections to the Etna story are petty, if valid, as Wright points out.¹⁰³ Peisianax was from Syracuse, and not from Acragas, Timaeus tells us. A valid point, but one that emphasizes the transfer of famous place names and bits of Sicilian history to the life of Empedocles. His rich student Pausanias did not set up a memorial, as would have been appropriate and expected.¹⁰⁴ As to the craters of Etna, Strabo long ago settled the practical question of Empedocles' immolation: it would have been impossible for Empedocles even to have approached the crater, much less have jumped into it. Timaeus' statement that the craters were not far off is rather surprising, since Etna is located some seventy miles from Acragas.¹⁰⁵ It is Timaeus' final objection, however, that gives the game away, revealing the biographical method at work: "How came Empedocles to jump into the craters, when he never once mentioned them?" Or, to put it another way, if Empedocles had any intention of jumping into Etna, he certainly would have mentioned Etna in his work. Since he never mentions Etna, he could not, therefore, have chosen to die there.¹⁰⁶ Here we have biographical logic in a nutshell: philosophers, and especially those who use the first-person "I," are in fact writing about themselves and all their statements are to be regarded and interpreted autobiographically. Therefore their deaths, every bit as much as their lives, must be apparent, discernable, and personally referenced in their work.

Empedocles, in short, lives and dies at the hands of his biographers. Every aspect of his life, and various deaths, was drawn from his philosophical works, interpreted in a biographical manner, and given concrete and anecdotal form in a biography that proceeds through standard topoi: meeting with tyrants, defending democracy, refusing to rule, helping the people, dying a suitable death. In dealing with the life of Empedocles, we, and he, are fortunate that his form of expression, poetic and highly metaphorical, allowed for a generous and usually benign interpretation and resulted in a favorable biographical tradition. Heraclitus, as we will see, was not so lucky.