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Empedocles' Other Cosmogony

This paper explores some of the difficulties in the reconstruction of Empedocles' cosmogonies. In particular, I discuss the nature of the cosmogony in the period of increasing Love within Empedocles' cycle of creation. Although he apparently did not describe this cosmogony explicitly, Empedocles' statement that there are two worlds of mortal things infers its existence. Its nature, moreover, can be deduced by examining Empedocles' sketch of the cosmogony of the world of mortal things in the period of increasing Strife and by taking into account the composition of the universe in the Many.

The testimonia describe a cosmogony (DK 31A30, 31A49); this raises the question of whether this account applies to both worlds. Aristotle, moreover, states that Empedocles could not and therefore did not describe a cosmogony in the period of increasing Love (DK 31A42). This suggests that the extant cosmogony depicts the creation of the world in the phase of increasing Strife and has led, in part, to the proliferation of the theory that there was only one creation of mortal things in the cycle. The subsequent interpretations vary widely but are not consistent with the contents of the Strasbourg papyrus (*ensemble* a (i)6-a(ii)2; cf. DK 31B21.7-12). Since two mortal worlds seem certain, this raises the questions discussed in this paper about the nature of this other cosmogony.

Scholars seem willing to accept that the cosmogony in the period of increasing Love cannot be reconstructed since Empedocles did not portray it. Despite this lack of explanation, however, its appearance can be determined from study of how the cycle works and by contrasting the cosmogony that is described. The cosmogony after the Many cannot be the same as the cosmogony outlined in the period between One and Many because the elements do not have the same arrangement during the Many and the One. Separation of the elements from a wholly unified state marks cosmogony in the phase of increasing Strife: fire and air move to the perimeter (or up) while earth and water move closer to the centre (or down) in order to create the world with which we are familiar. Beginning from the Many (the cosmogony that Empedocles fails to depict), on the other hand, the elements are already in the natural configuration for the world: four concentric spheres with the heaviest element at the centre and the lightest at the edge: their so-called "natural" positions. It is only a short step for the unifying action of Love to bring unlike elements together. Cosmogony at this point in the cycle is, therefore, not only possible, but is less complicated than the one that Empedocles does describe.