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Joel Alvarez<sup>1</sup>

## **Empedocles's Ethics on the *Daimones* and their Purification<sup>2</sup>**

The presocratic philosophers use various forms of the word *daimōn* to refer to goddesses, gods, powers, demons, divinities, or spirits. For instance, Heraclitus says, "Character for a human is his *daimōn*,"<sup>3</sup> and Parmenides calls necessity "Divinity" (*daimōn*).<sup>4</sup> Each of them uses the word differently, and, of course, this usage depends on the context. My focus here will be on Empedocles and the fragment in which he says that the *daimones* are punished for breaking an oath (D10/B115).<sup>5</sup> In particular, Empedocles says that they are punished because they committed murder or perjury. Some scholars suggest that the breaking of the oath pertains to what Empedocles says in D28-D29/B136-B137, where Empedocles relates the evil actions the *daimones* committed, such as murder and devouring each other.<sup>6</sup> However, it is not clear whether what

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<sup>2</sup> Many thanks to the Cambridge Faculty of Classics, the graduate students from that department, and the organizers of the Twelfth Annual Cambridge Graduate Conference in Ancient Philosophy for allowing me to present my paper.

<sup>3</sup> Heraclitus D111/B119, in *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume III: Early Ionian Thinkers*, ed. and trans. André Laks and Glenn W. Most (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Parmenides R55, in *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume V: Western Greek Thinkers*, ed. and trans. André Laks and Glenn W. Most (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> All quotations of Empedocles are from *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume V*, ed. and trans. Laks and Most.

<sup>6</sup> Andrej Petrovic and Ivana Petrovic, *Inner Purity and Pollution in Greek Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), state that the *daimones* broke the oath by committing murder (89). Catherine Osborne, "Empedocles Recycled," *Classical Quarterly* 37.1 (1987): 24-50, also offers a literal interpretation, stating that murder is the death of a god (48).

Empedocles says in D28-D29/B136-B137 has any connection to D10/B115. In fact, Empedocles's use of "murder" (*phonos*)<sup>7</sup> in D10/B115 may mean something other than the word's literal meaning and thus does not pertain to the murder and cannibalism mentioned in D28-D29/B136-B137. My argument for this is threefold: (a) Empedocles's use of the word *phonos* in D10/B115 does not have a literal connotation but rather a figurative one; (b) the punishment of the *daimones* is caused by them relying on strife and not the cannibalism, eating of meat, or murder suggested by D28-D29/B136-B137; (c) the *daimones* can only be purified if they abstain from such things. By understanding the difference between what Empedocles says in D10/115 and D28-D29/B136-B137 we can develop a better understanding of what he means regarding the transgression of the *daimones* and their purification.

### 1. What is a *daimōn* for Empedocles?

Before discussing Empedocles's use of the term for murder in a figurative sense, we must first discuss who the *daimones* are in his works. Empedocles does not specify precisely what *daimones* are. One group of scholars suggests that *daimones* were divine beings who fell but can regain their divine state, while others suggest they are the elements who became mortal beings by strife.<sup>8</sup> I take the former

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that Plutarch's manuscript quotes Empedocles as using the term *phobōi* in B115.3. This would yield the meaning: pollutes his limbs "with fear" or "from fear." The first scholar who decided that this cannot be what Empedocles really wrote, and must be the result of a copyist's error, was Stephanus in 1572. He changed the text to *phonōi*, which would give the sense, "pollutes his limbs by murder" or "with blood." See M. David Litwa, *Posthuman Transformation in Ancient Mediterranean Thought: Becoming Angels and Demons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 42-43.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, Spyridon Rangos, "Empedocles on Divine Nature," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 3 (2012): 315-38, states that the *daimones* regain their immortal state when they reach the end of their reincarnation (327). On the other hand, John Palmer, "Ethics and Natural Philosophy in Empedocles," in *Early Greek Ethics*, ed. David C. Wolfsdorf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 54-73, argues the *daimones* are the elements who depart from the *sphairos* because of strife (68).

to be more promising since Empedocles, although he does not specify, suggests that the *daimones* were divine beings who became mortal but later regain their immortal status. I thus seek here to first decipher who precisely the *daimones* are for Empedocles.

*1.1 Daimones as mortals and immortals*

In Empedocles's system, gods are immortal, humans are not immortal, but *daimones* seem to be both immortal and not immortal. There are two different phases of the *daimones'* life. One phase is when they lost their immortal state (away from the blessed ones) when they polluted their limbs by murder and the other when they regain their immortal state (when they return from being away from the blessed ones). The first phase is described in D10/B115, where Empedocles says that he is a *daimōn* who has been exiled from the divine, indicating that the *daimones'* home was not in the same place where mortals reside:

There is an oracle of Necessity, an ancient decree of the gods,  
Eternal, sealed by broad oaths:

Whenever by crimes some one [*scil.* of them] pollutes his  
limbs, by murder

< . . . > whoever commits a fault by perjuring himself on oath,  
The divinities (*daimones*) who have received as lot a long life  
Must wander thrice ten thousand seasons far from the  
blessed ones,

Growing during this time in the different forms of mortal  
beings,

Exchanging the painful paths of life.

For the force of the aether chases them toward the sea,  
The sea spits them out toward earth's surface, the earth  
toward the rays

Of the bright sun, and he [i.e., the sun] hurls them into the  
eddies of the aether.

Each one receives them from another, but all hate them.

Of them, I too am now one, an exile from the divine and a  
wanderer,

I who relied on insane Strife.

ἔστιν Ἀνάγκης χρῆμα, θεῶν ψήφισμα παλαιόν,  
αἰδίων, πλατέεσσι κατεσφρηγισμένον ὄρκοις·  
εὐτέ τις ἀμπλακίησι φόνω φίλα γυῖα μῆνη  
ὅς κ' ἐπίορκον ἀμαρτήσας ἐπομόσση,  
δαίμονες οἶτε μακρᾶίωνος λελάχασι βίοιο,  
τρῖς μιν μυριάς ὥρας ἀπὸ μακάρων ἀλάλησθαι,  
φυομένους παντοῖα διὰ χρόνου εἶδεα θνητῶν  
ἀργαλέας βιότοιο μεταλλάσσοντα κελεύθους.  
αιθέριον μὲν γὰρ σφε μένος πόντονδε διώκει,  
πόντος δ' ἐς χθονὸς οὐδας ἀπέπτυσσε, γαῖα δ' ἐς αὐγὰς  
ἠελίου φαέθοντος, ὁ δ' αιθέρος ἔμβαλε δίναις·  
ἄλλος δ' ἐξ ἄλλου δέχεται, στυγέουσι δὲ πάντες.  
τῶν καὶ ἐγὼ νῦν εἰμι, φυγὰς θεόθεν καὶ ἀλήτης,  
Νεΐκει μαινομένῳ πίσυνος. (D10/B115)

The *daimones* here committed a crime and as a result they lost their immortal state and suffered the punishment of “wandering thrice ten thousand seasons far from the blessed ones.” In other words, the *daimones* once were physically close to the blessed ones,<sup>9</sup> but then they were exiled and removed from the blessed ones’ presence. Moreover, the *daimones* lose their immortal state and instead are bound to different mortal bodies as part of their punishment. As stated in D10/B115.5, the *daimones* “have received as lot a long life,” wandering in their exile as different mortal beings. Although Empedocles says the *daimones* have a “long life,” this does not give them attributes similar to the gods they are separated from (the

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<sup>9</sup> Although the *daimones* are mortal beings who later regain their immortal status, they differ from other immortals. Empedocles suggests who these other divine beings are when he says they “must wander thrice ten thousand seasons far from the blessed ones” (D10/B115.6). The relevant point is that the *daimones* are separated from what Empedocles calls “the blessed ones” (*makaroi*). In other Greek texts, “the blessed ones” are immortal and indestructible. For instance, in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 5, the daughter of Zeus tells Anchises not to fear her and the other blessed ones. In this case, “the blessed ones” are gods who the *daimones* share a table with when they blossom as gods. Therefore, the blessed ones are other immortal beings that are different from the *daimones* that are separated from them.

blessed ones). Instead, the *daimones* are bound to mortal bodies that now live a “long life” by wandering “thrice ten thousand seasons” on earth as “different forms of mortal beings.”

Other passages in Empedocles suggest that the *daimones* can indeed regain their immortal status (D39-D40/B146-B147):

At the end they become seers, hymn singers, doctors,  
And leaders (*promoi*) for humans on the earth,  
And then they blossom up as gods, the greatest in honors.  
Sharing the hearth with other immortals, sitting at the  
same table,  
Without any share in men’s sufferings, indestructible.

εἰς δὲ τέλος μάντεις τε καὶ ὕμνοπόλοι καὶ ἰητροί  
καὶ πρόμοι ἀνθρώποισιν ἐπιχθονίοισι πέλονται,  
ἔνθεν ἀναβλαστοῦσι θεοὶ τιμῆσι φέριστοι.  
ἀθανάτοις ἄλλοισιν ὀμέσσιοι, αὐτοτράπεζοι  
έόντες, ἀνδρείων ἀχέων ἀπόκληροι, ἀτειρεῖς.

Thus the *daimones*, through their wandering of “thrice ten thousand seasons” as different life forms, will eventually “blossom up as gods, the greatest in honors.” This passage connects with D77/B21.9-12, which says that the long-lived gods are called the greatest in honor:

For it is out of these that all things come that were, all that  
are and that will be,  
Trees have grown [*scil.* from these], men and women,  
Wild beasts and birds, water-nourished fish,  
And long-lived gods, the greatest in honors.

ἐκ τούτων γὰρ πάνθ’ ὅσα τ’ ἦν ὅσα τ’ ἔστι καὶ ἔσται,  
δένδρεά τ’ ἐβλάστησε καὶ ἀνέρες ἠδὲ γυναῖκες,  
θῆρες τ’ οἰωνοὶ τε καὶ ὕδατοθρέμμονες ἰχθύς,  
καὶ τε θεοὶ δολιχαίωνες τιμῆσι φέριστοι.

As seen in D40/B147, the gods have the title “greatest in honors,” and this epithet is also mentioned in D60/B23.8 and D73.272. In D40/B147, however, the *daimones* “blossom up as gods, the greatest in honors” and they share a table with “other immortals.” In this stage of their development, the *daimones* have regained their immortal status and

are now indestructible since they are in the realm where other immortals reside.

In D39-D40/B146-B147, Empedocles implies that the *daimones*, who become the greatest in honor, go through a change from one form to another, where the final stage is the regaining of the immortal status of a god. He states that the *daimones* are “growing during this time in the different forms of mortal beings” who eventually at their final season, after wandering “thrice ten thousand seasons,” blossom from humans with various honorable titles (seers, hymn singers, doctors, and leaders) into indestructible “gods.” Thus the *daimones* have to undergo a transformation to regain their immortal state. We can conclude that in Empedocles’s understanding the *daimones* are divine beings who became bound to a mortal body and later regained their immortal state, becoming gods once again.

Having established how Empedocles uses the term *daimones* and what he understands them to be, the next section will further discuss the *daimones*’ punishment and its figurative implication.

## 2. The *daimones*’ punishment

As stated in D10/B115, the *daimones* were punished for breaking an oath. It is not said what exactly this oath was and why the *daimones* were punished for breaking it, though scholars argue that perhaps the crime they committed is murder or perjury.<sup>10</sup> However, I argue in what follows that Empedocles is not speaking of murder or perjury in a literal sense, but rather using the word for murder in a figurative sense in D10/B115.3. I will also discuss how the punishment of the *daimones* is caused by them relying on strife and not by committing cannibalism, eating meat, or murdering, as suggested by D28-D29/B136-B137.

### 2.1 *The daimones*’ crime: murder or cannibalism?

For Empedocles, when the *daimones* had divine status (before they lost their immortality), they were under an oath, and in D10/

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<sup>10</sup> For instance, Petrovic and Petrovic, *Inner Purity*, 89, believe the broken oath in B115 is caused by murder.

B115.1-4 it seems that the crime they committed had to do with them not following that oath:<sup>11</sup>

There is an oracle of Necessity, an ancient decree of the  
gods,  
Eternal, sealed by broad oaths:  
Whenever by crimes some one [*scil.* of them] pollutes  
his limbs, by murder < . . >  
whoever commits a fault by perjuring himself on  
oath...

ἔστιν Ἀνάγκης χρῆμα, θεῶν ψήφισμα παλαιόν,  
αἰδίον, πλατέεσσι κατεσφρηγισμένον ὄρκοις·  
εὖτέ τις ἀμπλακίησι φόνῳ φίλα γυῖα μίηνῃ.  
ὅς κ' ἐπίορκον ἀμαρτήσας ἐπομόσση...

Though is not clear exactly what the oath said or entails, it seems that the *daimones'* reliance on strife caused them to break it since later in D10/B115.13-14 Empedocles calls himself a *daimōn* and says, "Of them, I too am now one, an exile from the divine and a wanderer, I who relied on insane Strife."<sup>12</sup> As implied, because the *daimones* relied on strife, the *daimones* broke their oath.

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<sup>11</sup> As mentioned above, what this oath was is not clear, but some scholars interpret it as an agreement among the *daimones* to maintain harmony and order in the cosmos. For instance, Cameron F. Coates, "Cosmic Democracy or Cosmic Monarchy? Empedocles in Plato's Statesman," *Polis: The Journal for Ancient Greek and Roman Political Thought* 35.2 (2018): 436-37, says that the oath signifies the change of office between love and strife which is the "fundamental structure of the cosmos." In other words, the change of reign between love and strife is a legal transaction between their time of reign in the cosmos. Thus, for Coates, the *daimones* were part of maintaining that order and they broke the oath by stepping out of their role in the order of the cosmos. In doing this, the *daimones* are relying on strife. This order and harmony of the cosmos is a common theme for the Presocratics.

<sup>12</sup> τῶν καὶ ἐγὼ νῦν εἶμι, φυγὰς θεόθεν καὶ ἀλήτης, Νεῖκεϊ μαινομένῳ πίσυνος (D10/B115). Says Rangos, "Empedocles on Divine Nature," 329: "Strife, as B115.14 states, must end when he practically suspends



In addition to breaking their oath, Empedocles also says that the *daimones* have committed murder. One can take murder (*phonos*) here to mean that the *daimones* killed someone, but it is not certain here whether it means a) killing another *daimōn* or b) cannibalism. I argue that *phonos* in D10/B115 does not mean cannibalism since that is not mentioned until later, when the *daimones* are in their mortal state (D28-29). Regarding (a) or (b), Empedocles does say in D28/B136 and D29/B137 that the *daimones* have committed such crimes (this will be discussed below). Still, it is confusing to suggest that the *daimones* were committing cannibalism or murdering immortal beings before becoming mortal beings. Such things do not happen in the realm of immortals. What does happen in the realm of the immortals is the swallowing of other gods. For instance, in Hesiod's *Theogony*, Cronus swallowed all of his offspring whole other than Zeus. Eventually Zeus saved his siblings by forcing Cronus to regurgitate them.<sup>13</sup> While this narrative involves consumption, it does not result in the death of Zeus or of his siblings, who are immortals and divine. Cannibalism and murder do not exist in this case, rather they only exist in the world of mortals.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, something besides murder and cannibalism must have caused the *daimones'* punishment in D10/B115.

This does not suggest that murder and cannibalism are completely unrelated to the *daimones*, however. They are related when it comes to the purification process, which is entirely different from the punishment (this will be discussed more below). The crux

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that confidence for the sake of the opposite force. [...] to put confidence in Strife practically means to shed blood and break an oath [...]."

<sup>13</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony* 453-500. Although Demeter is said to have eaten a piece of Pelops at the feast of Tantalus, he was not a divine being and, in any case, survived the ordeal.

<sup>14</sup> Jean Claude Picot, "Empedocles, Fragment 115.3: Can One of the Blessed Pollute his Limbs with Blood?," in *Reading Ancient Texts. Volume I: Presocratics and Plato*, eds. Suzanne Stern-Gillet and Kevin Corrigan (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 54, explains that for Empedocles, "Meat eating and cannibalism upset things. [...] It is all too clear that murders, the eating of meat, and cannibalism are activities that take place on earth, for the eating of flesh is something inconceivable in a heavenly abode."

of the problem is that interpreting Empedocles to hold that they are the reason for the *daimones'* punishment would require a belief that no Greek adheres to: the death of divine beings.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, murder or cannibalism cannot be the primary acts that caused the *daimones*, through punishment, to become mortal.

Although murder is not the reason for the *daimones'* punishment, it does happen when the *daimones* are mortal beings (after the punishment). In D28-D29/B136-B137 Empedocles says,

Will you not desist from evil-sounding murder? Do you  
not see  
That you are devouring each other in the carelessness of  
your mind?  
The father, lifting up his own son who has changed  
shape,  
Cuts his throat, with a prayer – fool that he is! The others  
are at a loss  
While they sacrifice the suppliant; but he [*scil.* the father],  
deaf to the shouts,  
Has cut the throat and prepared an evil meal in his  
house.  
In the same way, a son seizes his father and children their  
mother,  
And ripping out their life they devour the flesh of their  
dear ones.

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<sup>15</sup> Here I refer not to demi-gods but to divine beings who are immortal and without a mortal parent. As Amit Baratz, "The Source of the Gods' Immortality in Archaic Greek Literature," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 34 (2015): 151-64, explains: "All the archaic poets share one basic notion: the gods are immanently immortal, and as such their eternal life does not depend on any external source. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this notion is one of the most persistent ideas of archaic poetry as a whole [...]. Immortality is common to all gods despite the great differences between them. For this reason the poets do not conceive that a god may die. Even when gods are defeated in great wars, at most they are thrown into the depths of Tartarus to continue their miserable existence there" (161-62).

οὐ παύσεσθε φόνοιο δυσηχέος; οὐκ ἔσορατε  
ἀλλήλους δάπτοντες ἀκηδείησι νόοιο;  
μορφὴν δ' ἀλλάξαντα πατὴρ φίλον υἱὸν αἰείρας  
σφάζει ἐπευχόμενος μέγα νήπιος· οἱ δ' ἀπορεῦνται  
λισσόμενον θύοντες, ὁ δ' αὖ νήκουστος ὁμοκλέων  
σφάξας ἐν μεγάροισι κακὴν ἀλεγύνατο δαῖτα.  
ὡς δ' αὐτῶς πατέρ' υἱὸς ἐλὼν καὶ μητέρα παῖδες  
θυμὸν ἀπορραΐσαντε φίλας κατὰ σάρκα εἶδουσιν.

The *daimones* in D10/B115 are “wandering thrice ten thousand seasons” as different forms of mortal beings. Above Empedocles says, “The father, lifting up his own son who has changed shape.” I understand the changing shape here to be the different states of reincarnation or transmigration that the *daimones* go through in D10/B115. In essence, when the *daimones* die in their mortal form, they continue their “wandering of thrice ten thousand seasons” as different life forms. Thus, the passage above indicates that the *daimones*, while living various lives as mortals, commit murder and cannibalism. They do this by eating animals that are reincarnations of themselves, since the *daimones* can take on many forms, including those of animals. For instance, a human being eating a fish would be cannibalism since, in essence, both the human and the fish can be manifestations of *daimones* in their mortal phases of existence. They could be *daimones* since part of the *daimones*' punishment is to be reincarnated into mortal beings.<sup>16</sup> Empedocles alludes to this possibility when he says (D13/B117):

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<sup>16</sup> K. Scarlett Kingsley and Richard Parry, “Empedocles,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. N. Zalta (Summer 2020 Edition), mention the *daimones*' reincarnation or transmigration: “Empedocles narrates his own dissolutions and recombination [...]. The wandering of the daemon forms a ‘ladder’ of transmigration, in a cycle ascending from animal to plant to human. This hierarchy of incarnation is further subdivided, with laurel at the highest plant rung; lions at the highest animal one; and seers, poets, doctors, and leaders of men for humans (B 127, 146 = D 36, 39). Theoretically, the cycle applies to all living creatures.” Palmer, “Ethics and Natural Philosophy,” 70, disagrees, saying there is no reincarnation or transmigration. Rather, the *daimones* are the elements who are involved and connected to all creatures.

For as for me, once I was already both a youth and a girl,  
A bush and a bird, and a sea-leaping, voyaging fish.

ἦδη γάρ ποτ' ἐγὼ γενόμεν κούροσ τε κόρη τεθάμνος  
τ' οἰωνός τε καὶ ἔξαλος ἔμπορος ἰχθύς.

In other words, a *daimōn* can be reincarnated as a human, fish, bird, or bush. Therefore, if human-*daimones* eat an animal, they are committing murder and cannibalism since they are eating the reincarnation of their own kind. Essentially, they are eating “the flesh of their dead ones” (D29/B137). What is important to note here is that the murder and cannibalism of D28-D29/B136-B137 are not the same as the murder (*phonos*) of D10/B115. Rather, murder and cannibalism exist when the *daimones* in their “wandering thrice ten thousand seasons” kill and eat their own as described in D28-D29/B136-B137.

## 2.2 Murder as figurative

If murder or cannibalism cannot be the reason behind the punishment of the *daimones*, since they can only exist for the *daimones* after they are in their mortal states following the punishment, D10/B115 may be employing a different sense of the word “murder.” Plutarch, in *On the Eating of Flesh* 996c, gives a guide to understanding what Empedocles may mean when he speaks of the *daimones*’ punishment.<sup>17</sup> Plutarch states, “It is surely not worse to declaim as a musical prelude and as a preface the verses of Empedocles. For he says allegorically there that the souls become bound to mortal bodies because they are being punished for having committed murder, consumed meat, and eaten each other.”<sup>18</sup> While Plutarch is, in my view, incorrect that the *daimones* are punished by being made mortal for having committed murder, consumed meat, and practiced cannibalism, he is correct in noting that Empedocles uses allegory. According to Diogenes Laertius, Aristotle also called Empedocles mastermind of metaphors: “Empedocles was Homeric and possessed powerful diction, since he was good at metaphors and

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<sup>17</sup> See Osborne, “Empedocles Recycled,” 29, on the value of Plutarch in interpreting Empedocles.

<sup>18</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia, volume XII*, trans. Harold Cherniss, W.C. Helmbold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 559.

used the other successful poetic devices.”<sup>19</sup> The same is indicated by Asclepius in his *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*:

Empedocles, what is the cause of motion in general? For one should not simply say that it is this way by nature, since everything is resolved too easily in this way. Hence we say, as we have often said, that Empedocles said all these things symbolically. For he did not suppose that the Sphere was destroyed, as he says it, and not the perceptible world either, but he was indicating by means of these expressions the ascent and descent of the soul.<sup>20</sup>

If we accept Plutarch’s, Aristotle’s, and Asclepius’s understanding of Empedocles’s style of writing, then the term for “murder” (*phonos*) may not have a literal connotation but rather a figurative one.

How, then, might Empedocles be using the term for “murder” in D10/B115? As seen previously, Plutarch’s interpretation of Empedocles conflicts with mine since he says murder, consuming meat, and eating each other is what caused the *daimones* to be bound to mortal bodies. But as we have seen these three things cannot be the case since some of these punishments only pertain while the *daimones* are mortal beings, i.e., in fragments D28/B136 and D29/B137. However, the murder of D10/B115 must be different from the murder of cannibalism, as argued above. Another possible interpretation of the word murder is that a decision made by the *daimones* caused their own death. In other words, by relying on strife the *daimones* caused themselves to be mortal. Thus, the word murder simply implies that they can now experience death since they have

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<sup>19</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *De poetis* 8.57, trans. Laks and Most, *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume V*, 582.

<sup>20</sup> Asclepius, *In Metaph.* 197.15-24, trans. Laks and Most, *Early Greek Philosophy V*, 662: ὁ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς, τί ἐστὶν αἰτίον τῆς ἀπλῶς κινήσεως; οὐ γὰρ δεῖ λέγειν ἀπλῶς ὅτι οὕτως πέφυκεν, ἐπεὶ οὕτω πάντα ῥᾶστα ἐπιλύεσθαι. λέγομεν οὖν ὁ πολλάκις εἴρηται, ὅτι πάντα ταῦτα συμβολικῶς ἔλεγεν ὁ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς· οὔτε γὰρ τὸν Σφαῖρον ὑπετίθετο φθειρῆσθαι, ὡς φησιν, οὔτε δὲ τὸν αἰσθητὸν κόσμον, ἀλλὰ διὰ τούτων ἐδήλου τὴν ἀνοδὸν καὶ τὴν κάθοδον τῆς ψυχῆς.

murdered their own divinity by becoming mortal beings that experience actual death.

This interpretation may be compared to the moment in Genesis 2:17 where God says to Adam, “if you eat of this tree, you shall surely die.” In this instance, “surely die” does not mean that Adam will die instantly, since Adam does not die until years later; rather, the phrase is commonly understood to mean that Adam will change from one state (in which he does not have worldly knowledge) into another (in which he does have worldly knowledge, and in which his relationship with God has been severed). In a similar fashion, “murder” in Empedocles can have the same sense as in Genesis: the murder that the *daimones* have committed is bringing death upon themselves.

Moreover, they bring this death upon themselves by relying on strife, as Empedocles states when he says that he is also one of the *daimones*: “Of them, I too am now one, an exile from the divine and a wanderer, I who relied on insane Strife” (D10/B115.13-14). In this sense for Empedocles and Genesis, the change of state of being because of a transgression leads to the second state where death becomes a possibility. Thus, the figurative meaning of murder is that the *daimones* relied on, adhered to, and submitted themselves to strife and thus caused themselves to become mortal beings. In other words, they murdered themselves just as Adam murdered himself when he committed an action that separated him from the divine.<sup>21</sup> Thus, “murder” (*phonos*) in D10/B115 does not have a literal meaning but a figurative one: the *daimones* brought punishment upon themselves by relying on strife, with the result that they, too, now

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<sup>21</sup> This illustration of divine beings and humans changing from one state to another is common in ancient thought. For instance, gods becoming mortal, losing their powers, being thrown to Tartarus, are instances of them being removed from the heavenly realm. In Homer, *Iliad* 19.125-31 Ate is tossed by Zeus into the human realm. One can see this in the Ancient Jewish book of Enoch, where spiritual beings (as stars) are thrown out of heaven (Enoch 18: 13-16, See also Enoch 21; 86-88; 90: 20-24). The *daimones* being cast away from the other divine beings is similar since in going from one state to another they are losing the immortality that they once had.

“shall surely die.” So, the *daimones* in Empedocles are immortal beings who are punished for breaking their oath and for committing “murder.” I read this “murder” as their decision to be guided by strife, and in doing to bring death upon themselves. Although the *daimones* are punished by being compelled to go through constant reincarnations, they will have a chance to regain their original status as immortal beings.

### 3. *Daimones* and their purification

Empedocles’s *daimones* have a chance of redemption; however, they need to undergo specific steps in order to regain their prior divinity. These steps involve certain ethical choices, including abstaining from the murder described in D28/B136 and D29/B137. The *daimones*’ redemption is the last stage of the wandering cycle in which they finally transform from mortals back to immortals. I offer here the last phase of my argument, in which I will try to show that the *daimones* can only be purified if they abstain from the murder and cannibalism indicated in D28/B136 and D29/B137.

#### 3.1 *The final stage of reincarnation*

As mentioned, for Empedocles, the *daimones*’ punishment is that they are continually reincarnated in the form of various mortal beings. However, there is a final stage of reincarnation that a *daimōn* can undergo which allows them to be released from the punishment. Empedocles states (D39-D40/B146-B147):

At the end they become seers, hymn singers, doctors,  
And leaders (*promoi*) for humans on the earth,  
And then they blossom up as gods, the greatest in honors.  
Sharing the hearth with other immortals, sitting at the  
same table,  
Without any share in men’s sufferings, indestructible.

εἰς δὲ τέλος μάντεις τε καὶ ὕμνοπόλοι καὶ ἱητροί  
καὶ πρόμοι ἀνθρώποισιν ἐπιχθονίοισι πέλονται,  
ἔνθεν ἀναβλαστοῦσι θεοὶ τιμῆσι φέριστοι.  
ἀθανάτοις ἄλλοισιν ὀμέστιοι, αὐτοτράπεζοι  
έόντες, ἀνδρείων ἀχέων ἀπόκληροί, ἀτειρεῖς.

As mentioned previously, the *daimōn* has various stages of reincarnation including becoming a fish, plant, bird, or human, as Empedocles stated about himself in D13/B117. The final stage of reincarnation, as described above, is becoming a human with advantageous status. In particular, becoming a human seer, hymn singer, doctor, or leader signifies that the *daimōn* has reached its final stage (“at the end”) and is in close proximity to becoming an immortal god: “And then they blossom up as gods, the greatest in honors” (D39-D40/B146-B147). Although it is clear from the above that the final stage for a *daimōn* is to become a human with elevated status, what precisely do *daimones* need to do in order to reach this final stage and, as a result, blossom as gods?

### 3.2 *Love and Strife and Empedocles’s ethics*

I argue that in order to reach the final stage, the *daimones* need to make choices that rely on love rather than strife. While relying on love would be the salvation for the *daimones*, by continually practicing strife the *daimones* cannot reach their final stage. They need to stop doing actions of strife in order to nullify their punishment. That is, the *daimones* need to do the opposite of what caused them to be punished in the first place.<sup>22</sup> Empedocles says (D73/B17.7-8):

Sometimes by Love all coming together into one,  
Sometimes again each one carried off by the hatred of Strife.  
<Thus insofar as they have learned to grow as one out of  
many,>

ἄλλοτε μὲν Φιλότητι συνερχόμεν’ εἰς ἓν ἅπαντα,  
ἄλλοτε δ’ αὖ δίχ’ ἕκαστα φορεύμενα Νείκεος ἔχθει.  
<οὕτως ἦι μὲν ἓν ἐκ πλεόνων μεμάθηκε φύεσθαι,>

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<sup>22</sup> Compare Rangos, “Empedocles on Divine Nature,” 329: “Strife, as B115.14 states, must end when he practically suspends that confidence for the sake of the opposite force. And since to put confidence in Strife practically means to shed blood and break an oath, to lay confidence in Love must mean to abstain from killing, reassume the binding oath, and exhibit an increased sense of care for life quite generally. We may reasonably assume that when the daemons finally incarnate as gods their confidence in Love reaches its culmination.”



Sometimes, under the influence of love, the *daimones* “come together into one,” and in contrast there are other instances in which the *daimones* are “carried off by the hatred of strife.” Empedocles revisits the imagery of D73/B17.7-8 again later in D73/B20:

For you will see the coming together and unfolding of  
generation,

<How Love and Strife . . . > crossing over.

This [*scil.* you will see] in the illustrious bulk of mortal  
limbs:

Sometimes by Love we come together into one, all

Limbs that the body has received in the flower of blooming  
life;

Sometimes in turn, cut apart by evil quarrels,

Each one wanders separately in the surf of life.

In the same way for bushes and water-dwelling fish

ὄψει γὰρ ξύνοδόν τε διάπτυξίν τε γενέθλη[ς]  
πῆι Φιλότης Νεϊκός τε δι|ἀκτορα μη[ | – – [P.Strasb. c]  
[τοῦτο μὲν ἄν βροτέων] μελέων ἀρι|δείκετον ὄγκον·]  
[ἄλλοτε μὲν Φιλότητι συν]ερχόμεθ' εἰς ἐν ἅπαντα]  
[γυῖα, τὰ σῶμα λέλογχε βίου θη]λοῦντος [ἐν ἀκμῆι,  
[ἄλλοτε δ' αὐτε κακῆισι διατμηθέντ' ἐρίδεσσιν]  
[πλάζεται ἄνδιχ' ἕκαστα περὶ] ῥη[γμῖνι βίοιο.]  
[ὥς δ' αὐτως θάμνοισι καὶ ἰχ]θύ[σιν ὑδρομελάθορις]

In both fragments, Empedocles describes the process of coming together into one being because of love, and separating out again because of strife. Empedocles further specifies that under the influence of strife, beings are “cut apart by evil quarrels.” This suggests that the constant doing of an action (quarrelling) is the cause of the division (being cut apart), and so gives a specific manifestation to the more general notion of strife. When the *daimones* are under the influence of strife, they are continually reincarnated into different mortal beings where they “wander separately in the surf of life” (D73/B20.4). The *daimones* ought to refrain from practicing the things described in D28/B136 and D29/B137, that is, murder, cannibalism,

and meat-eating.<sup>23</sup> If the *daimones* abstain from murder, cannibalism, meat-eating, and any action that takes place under the influence of strife, then they will blossom up as gods where they can “share the hearth with other immortals, sitting at the same table, without any share in men’s sufferings, indestructible” (D40/B147). Therefore, by relying on love rather than strife, the *daimones* can regain their divine and immortal status.

## **Conclusion**

The *daimones* in Empedocles’s thought are immortal beings who are punished for relying on strife. By relying on strife, the formerly immortal *daimones* bring death upon themselves and enter an existence in which they are reincarnated as fish, birds, beasts, plants, or humans. In order to remove themselves from this system of punishment, they need to undergo a purification which enables them to regain their status as immortal beings. This purification is only possible when the *daimōn* abstains from actions involving strife, such as murder, cannibalism, and meat-eating, and instead practices acts that take place under the influence of love. Once the *daimones* succeed in doing these things, they become immortal beings once again. Other scholars of Empedocles have argued that murder (*phonos*) has a literal meaning in D10/B115, but as I argue, it is better understood as not being used in a literal sense since such things cannot happen in the heavenly realm. I argue instead that what Empedocles means by the term “murder” is that the *daimones* brought death upon themselves. This interpretation safeguards the principle in ancient Greek thought that the divine cannot die and provides consistency within Empedocles’s ethical framework.

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<sup>23</sup> See Litwa, *Posthuman Transformation*, 43: “After 30,000 seasons, incarnate humans would reattain their daimonic state if they followed the rules of purity, namely abstention from killing, perjury, and bloodshed.”

